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ESSAYS

BY

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ESSAYS

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THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM AT THE PRESENT TIME

THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM AT THE PRESENT TIME

MANY objections have been made to a proposition which, in some remarks of mine on translating Homer, I ventured to put forth; a proposition about criticism, and its importance at the present day. I said: 'Of the literature of France and Germany, as of the intellect of Europe in general, the main effort, for now many years, has been a critical effort; the endeavour, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is.' I added, that owing to the operation in English literature of certain causes, 'almost the last thing for which one would come to English literature is just that very thing which

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now Europe most desires,—criticism ;’ and that the power and value of English literature was thereby impaired. More than one rejoinder declared that the importance I here assigned to criticism was excessive, and asserted the inherent superiority of the creative effort of the human spirit over its critical effort. And the other day, having been led by a Mr Shairp’s excellent notice of Wordsworth to turn again to his biography, I found, in the words of this great man, whom I, for one, must always listen to with the profoundest respect, a sentence passed on the critic’s business, which seems to justify every possible disparagement of it. Wordsworth says in one of his letters :—

‘The writers in these publications’ (the Reviews), ‘while they prosecute their inglorious employment, can not be supposed to be in a state of mind very favourable for being affected by the finer influences of a thing so pure as genuine poetry.’

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And a trustworthy reporter of his conversation quotes a more elaborate judgment to the same effect:—

‘Wordsworth holds the critical power very low, infinitely lower than the inventive; and he said to-day that if the quantity of time consumed in writing critiques on the works of others were given to original composition, of whatever kind it might be, it would be much better employed; it would make a man find out sooner his own level, and it would do infinitely less mischief. A false or malicious criticism may do much injury to the minds of others; a stupid invention, either in prose or verse, is quite harmless.’

It is almost too much to expect of poor human nature, that a man capable of producing some effect in one line of literature, should, for the greater good of society, voluntarily doom himself to impotence and obscurity in another. Still less is this to be expected from men addicted to the composition of

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the 'false or malicious criticism' of which Wordsworth speaks. However, everybody would admit that a false or malicious criticism had better never have been written. Everybody, too, would be willing to admit, as a general proposition, that the critical faculty is lower than the inventive. But is it true that criticism is really, in itself, a baneful and injurious employment; is it true that all time given to writing critiques on the works of others would be much better employed if it were given to original composition, of whatever kind this may be? Is it true that Johnson had better have gone on producing more 'Irenes' instead of writing his 'Lives of the Poets'; nay, is it certain that Wordsworth himself was better employed in making his Ecclesiastical Sonnets than when he made his celebrated Preface, so full of criticism, and criticism of the works of others? Wordsworth was himself a great critic, and it is to be sincerely regretted that

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he has not left us more criticism; Goethe was one of the greatest of critics, and we may sincerely congratulate ourselves that he has left us so much criticism. Without wasting time over the exaggeration which Wordsworth's judgment on criticism clearly contains, or over an attempt to trace the causes,—not difficult, I think, to be traced,—which may have led Wordsworth to this exaggeration, a critic may with advantage seize an occasion for trying his own conscience, and for asking himself of what real service at any given moment the practice of criticism either is or may be made to his own mind and spirit, and to the minds and spirits of others.

The critical power is of lower rank than the creative. True; but in assenting to this proposition, one or two things are to be kept in mind. It is undeniable that the exercise of a creative power, that a free creative activity, is the highest function of man; it is

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proved to be so by man's finding in it his true happiness. But it is undeniable, also, that men may have the sense of exercising this free creative activity in other ways than in producing great works of literature or art; if it were not so, all but a very few men would be shut out from the true happiness of all men. They may have it in well-doing, they may have it in learning, they may have it even in criticising. This is one thing to be kept in mind. Another is, that the exercise of the creative power in the production of great works of literature or art, however high this exercise of it may rank, is not at all epochs and under all conditions possible; and that therefore labour may be vainly spent in attempting it, which might with more fruit be used in preparing for it, in rendering it possible. This creative power works with elements, with materials; what if it has not those materials, those elements, ready for its use? In that case

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it must surely wait till they are ready. Now, in literature,—I will limit myself to literature, for it is about literature that the question arises,—the elements with which the creative power works are ideas; the best ideas on every matter which literature touches, current at the time. At any rate we may lay it down as certain that in modern literature no manifestation of the creative power not working with these can be very important or fruitful. And I say current at the time, not merely accessible at the time; for creative literary genius does not principally show itself in discovering new ideas, that is rather the business of the philosopher. The grand work of literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery; its gift lies in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, by a certain order of ideas, when it finds itself in them; of dealing divinely with

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these ideas, presenting them in the most effective and attractive combinations,—making beautiful works with them, in short. But it must have the atmosphere, it must find itself amidst the order of ideas, in order to work freely; and these it is not so easy to command. This is why great creative epochs in literature are so rare, this is why there is so much that is unsatisfactory in the productions of many men of real genius; because, for the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment; the creative power has, for its happy exercise, appointed elements, and those elements are not in its own control.

Nay, they are more within the control of the critical power. It is the business of the critical power, as I said in the words already quoted, ‘in all branches of knowledge, theology philo-

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sophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is.' Thus it tends, at last, to make an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself. It tends to establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces; to make the best ideas prevail. Presently these new ideas reach society, the touch of truth is the touch of life, and there is a stir and growth everywhere; out of this stir and growth come the creative epochs of literature.

Or, to narrow our range, and quit these considerations of the general march of genius and of society,—considerations which are apt to become too abstract and impalpable,—every one can see that a poet, for instance, ought to know life and the world before dealing with them in poetry; and life and the world being in modern times very complex things, the creation of a modern poet, to be worth much, implies a great

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critical effort behind it; else it must be a comparatively poor, barren, and short-lived affair. This is why Byron's poetry had so little endurance in it, and Goethe's so much; both Byron and Goethe had a great productive power, but Goethe's was nourished by a great critical effort providing the true materials for it, and Byron's was not; Goethe knew life and the world, the poet's necessary subjects, much more comprehensively and thoroughly than Byron. He knew a great deal more of them, and he knew them much more as they really are.

It has long seemed to me that the burst of creative activity in our literature, through the first quarter of this century, had about it in fact something premature; and that from this cause its productions are doomed, most of them, in spite of the sanguine hopes which accompanied and do still accompany them, to prove hardly more lasting than the productions of far less

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splendid epochs. And this prematureness comes from its having proceeded without having its proper data, without sufficient materials to work with. In other words, the English poetry of the first quarter of this century, with plenty of energy, plenty of creative force, did not know enough. This makes Byron so empty of matter, Shelley so incoherent, Wordsworth even, profound as he is, yet so wanting in completeness and variety. Wordsworth cared little for books and disparaged Goethe. I admire Wordsworth, as he is, so much that I cannot wish him different; and it is vain, no doubt, to imagine such a man different from what he is, to suppose that he could have been different. But surely the one thing wanting to make Wordsworth an even greater poet than he is,—his thought richer, and his influence of wider application,—was that he should have read more books, among them, no doubt, those of that

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Goethe whom he disparaged without reading him.

But to speak of books and reading may easily lead to a misunderstanding here. It was not really books and reading that lacked to our poetry at this epoch; Shelley had plenty of reading, Coleridge had immense reading. Pindar and Sophocles—as we all say so glibly, and often with so little discernment of the real import of what we are saying—had not many books; Shakspeare was no deep reader. True; but in the Greece of Pindar and Sophocles, in the England of Shakspeare, the poet lived in a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power; society was, in the fullest measure, permeated by fresh thought, intelligent and alive. And this state of things is the true basis for the creative power's exercise, in this it finds its data, its materials, truly ready for its hand; all the books and reading in the world are only valuable as they

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are helps to this. Even when this does not actually exist, books and reading may enable a man to construct a kind of semblance of it in his own mind, a world of knowledge and intelligence in which he may live and work. This is by no means an equivalent to the artist for the nationally diffused life and thought of the epochs of Sophocles or Shakspeare; but, besides that it may be a means of preparation for such epochs, it does really constitute, if many share in it, a quickening and sustaining atmosphere of great value. Such an atmosphere the many-sided learning and the long and widely-combined critical effort of Germany formed for Goethe, when he lived and worked. There was no national glow of life and thought there as in the Athens of Pericles or the England of Elizabeth. That was the poet's weakness. But there was a sort of equivalent for it in the complete culture and unfettered thinking of a large body of Germans.

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That was his strength. In the England of the first quarter of this century there was neither a national glow of life and thought, such as we had in the age of Elizabeth, nor yet a culture and a force of learning and criticism such as were to be found in Germany. Therefore the creative power of poetry wanted, for success in the highest sense, materials and a basis; a thorough interpretation of the world was necessarily denied to it.

At first sight it seems strange that out of the immense stir of the French Revolution and its age should not have come a crop of works of genius equal to that which came out of the stir of the great productive time of Greece, or out of that of the Renascence, with its powerful episode the Reformation. But the truth is that the stir of the French Revolution took a character which essentially distinguished it from such movements as these. These were, in the main, disinterestedly intellectual

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and spiritual movements; movements in which the human spirit looked for its satisfaction in itself and in the increased play of its own activity. The French Revolution took a political, practical character. The movement which went on in France under the old régime, from 1700 to 1789, was far more really akin than that of the Revolution itself to the movement of the Renaissance; the France of Voltaire and Rousseau told far more powerfully upon the mind of Europe than the France of the Revolution. Goethe reproached this last expressly with having 'thrown quiet culture back.' Nay, and the true key to how much in our Byron, even in our Wordsworth, is this!—that they had their source in a great movement of feeling, not in a great movement of mind. The French Revolution, however,—that object of so much blind love and so much blind hatred,—found undoubtedly its motive-power in the intelligence of men, and

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not in their practical sense; this is what distinguishes it from the English Revolution of Charles the First's time. This is what makes it a more spiritual event than our Revolution, an event of much more powerful and world-wide interest, though practically less successful; it appeals to an order of ideas which are universal, certain, permanent. 1789 asked of a thing, Is it rational? 1642 asked of a thing, Is it legal? or, when it went furthest, Is it according to conscience? This is the English fashion, a fashion to be treated, within its own sphere, with the highest respect; for its success, within its own sphere, has been prodigious. But what is law in one place is not law in another, what is law here to-day is not law even here to-morrow; and as for conscience, what is binding on one man's conscience is not binding on another's. The old woman who threw her stool at the head of the surpliced minister in St Giles's Church at Edinburgh obeyed an im-

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pulse to which millions of the human race may be permitted to remain strangers. But the prescriptions of reason are absolute, unchanging of universal validity ; to count by tens is the easiest way of counting—that is a proposition of which everyone, from here to the Antipodes, feels the force ; at least I should say so if we did not live in a country where it is not impossible that any morning we may find a letter in the *Times* declaring that a decimal coinage is an absurdity. That a whole nation should have been penetrated with an enthusiasm for pure reason, and with an ardent zeal for making its prescriptions triumph, is a very remarkable thing, when we consider how little of mind, or anything so worthy and quickening as mind, comes into the motives which alone, in general, impel great masses of men. In spite of the extravagant direction given to this enthusiasm, in spite of the crimes and follies in which it lost itself, the French

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Revolution derives from the force, truth, and universality of the ideas which it took for its law, and from the passion with which it could inspire a multitude for these ideas, a unique and still living power; it is—it will probably long remain—the greatest, the most animating event in history. And as no sincere passion for the things of the mind, even though it turn out in many respects an unfortunate passion, is ever quite thrown away and quite barren of good, France has reaped from hers one fruit—the natural and legitimate fruit, though not precisely the grand fruit she expected: she is the country in Europe where ‘the people’ is most alive.

But the mania for giving an immediate political and practical application to all these fine ideas of the reason was fatal. Here an Englishman is in his element: on this theme we can all go on for hours. And all we are in the habit of saying on it has undoubtedly

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a great deal of truth. Ideas cannot be too much prized in and for themselves, cannot be too much lived with; but to transport them abruptly into the world of politics and practice, violently to revolutionise this world to their bidding,—that is quite another thing. There is the world of ideas and there is the world of practice; the French are often for suppressing the one and the English the other; but neither is to be suppressed. A member of the House of Commons said to me the other day: ‘That a thing is an anomaly, I consider to be no objection to it whatever.’ I venture to think he was wrong; that a thing is an anomaly is an objection to it, but absolutely and in the sphere of ideas: it is not necessarily, under such and such circumstances, or at such and such a moment, an objection to it in the sphere of politics and practice. Joubert has said beautifully: ‘C’est la force et le droit qui règlent toutes choses dans le monde; la force en attendant

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le droit.' (Force and right are the governors of this world; force till right is ready.) Force till right is ready; and till right is ready, force, the existing order of things, is justified, is the legitimate ruler. But right is something moral, and implies inward recognition, free assent of the will; we are not ready for right,—right, so far as we are concerned, is not ready,—until we have attained this sense of seeing it and willing it. The way in which for us it may change and transform force, the existing order of things, and become, in its turn, the legitimate ruler of the world, should depend on the way in which, when our time comes, we see it and will it. Therefore for other people enamoured of their own newly discerned right, to attempt to impose it upon us as ours, and violently to substitute their right for our force, is an act of tyranny, and to be resisted. It sets at nought the second great half of our maxim, force till right is ready.

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This was the grand error of the French Revolution; and its movement of ideas, by quitting the intellectual sphere and rushing furiously into the political sphere, ran, indeed, a prodigious and memorable course, but produced no such intellectual fruit as the movement of ideas of the Renaissance, and created, in opposition to itself, what I may call an epoch of concentration. The great force of that epoch of concentration was England; and the great voice of that epoch of concentration was Burke. It is the fashion to treat Burke's writings on the French Revolution as superannuated and conquered by the event; as the eloquent but unphilosophical tirades of bigotry and prejudice. I will not deny that they are often disfigured by the violence and passion of the moment, and that in some directions Burke's view was bounded, and his observation therefore at fault. But on the whole, and for those who can make the needful cor-

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rections, what distinguishes these writings is their profound, permanent, fruitful, philosophical truth. They contain the true philosophy of an epoch of concentration, dissipate the heavy atmosphere which its own nature is apt to engender round it, and make its resistance rational instead of mechanical.

But Burke is so great because, almost alone in England, he brings thought to bear upon politics, he saturates politics with thought. It is his accident that his ideas were at the service of an epoch of concentration, not of an epoch of expansion; it is his characteristic that he so lived by ideas, and had such a source of them welling up within him, that he could float even an epoch of concentration and English Tory politics with them. It does not hurt him that Dr Price and the Liberals were enraged with him; it does not even hurt him that George the Third and the Tories were enchanted with him. His great-

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ness is that he lived in a world which neither English Liberalism nor English Toryism is apt to enter;—the world of ideas, not the world of catchwords and party habits. So far is it from being really true of him that he ‘to party gave up what was meant for mankind,’ that at the very end of his fierce struggle with the French Revolution, after all his invectives against its false pretensions, hollowness, and madness, with his sincere conviction of its mischievousness, he can close a memorandum on the best means of combating it, some of the last pages he ever wrote,—the ‘Thoughts on French Affairs’ in December 1791,—with these striking words:—

‘The evil is stated, in my opinion, as it exists. The remedy must be where power, wisdom, and information, I hope, are more united with good intentions than they can be with me. I have done with this subject, I believe, for ever. It has given me many anxious moments

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for the last two years. If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it; the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope will forward it; and then they who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs, will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself, than the mere designs of men. They will not be resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate.'

That return of Burke upon himself has always seemed to me one of the finest things in English literature, or indeed in any literature. That is what I call living by ideas: when one side of a question has long had your earnest support, when all your feelings are engaged, when you hear all round you no language but one, when your party talks this language like a steam-engine and can imagine no other,—still to be able to think, still to be irresistibly carried, if so it be, by the current of

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thought to the opposite side of the question, and, like Balaam, to be unable to speak anything but what the Lord has put in your mouth. I know nothing more striking, and I must add that I know nothing more un-English.

For the Englishman in general is like my friend the Member of Parliament, and believes, point-blank, that for a thing to be an anomaly is absolutely no objection to it whatever. He is like the Lord Auckland of Burke's day, who, in a memorandum on the French Revolution, talks of 'certain miscreants, assuming the name of philosophers, who have presumed themselves capable of establishing a new system of society.' The Englishman has been called a political animal, and he values what is political and practical so much that ideas easily become objects of dislike in his eyes, and thinkers 'miscreants,' because ideas and thinkers have rashly meddled with politics and practice. This would be

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all very well if the dislike and neglect confined themselves to ideas transported out of their own sphere, and meddling rashly with practice; but they are inevitably extended to ideas as such, and to the whole life of intelligence; practice is everything, a free play of the mind is nothing. The notion of the free play of the mind upon all subjects being a pleasure in itself, being an object of desire, being an essential provider of elements without which a nation's spirit, whatever compensations it may have for them, must, in the long run, die of inanition, hardly enters into an Englishman's thoughts. It is noticeable that the word curiosity, which in other languages is used in a good sense, to mean, as a high and fine quality of man's nature, just this disinterested love of a free play of the mind on all subjects, for its own sake,—it is noticeable, I say, that this word has in our language no sense of the kind, no sense but a

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rather bad and disparaging one. But criticism, real criticism, is essentially the exercise of this very quality. It obeys an instinct prompting it to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of practice, politics, and everything of the kind; and to value knowledge and thought as they approach this best, without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever. This is an instinct for which there is, I think, little original sympathy in the practical English nature, and what there was of it has undergone a long benumbing period of blight and suppression in the epoch of concentration which followed the French Revolution.

But epochs of concentration cannot well endure for ever; epochs of expansion, in the due course of things, follow them. Such an epoch of expansion seems to be opening in this country. In the first place all danger of a hostile forcible pressure of foreign ideas

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upon our practice has long disappeared; like the traveller in the fable, therefore, we begin to wear our cloak a little more loosely. Then, with a long peace, the ideas of Europe steal gradually and amicably in, and mingle, though in infinitesimally small quantities at a time, with our own notions. Then, too, in spite of all that is said about the absorbing and brutalising influence of our passionate material progress, it seems to me indisputable that this progress is likely, though not certain, to lead in the end to an apparition of intellectual life; and that man, after he has made himself perfectly comfortable and has now to determine what to do with himself next, may begin to remember that he has a mind, and that the mind may be made the source of great pleasure. I grant it is mainly the privilege of faith, at present, to discern this end to our railways, our business, and our fortune-making; but we shall see if, here as elsewhere, faith

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is not in the end the true prophet. Our ease, our travelling, and our unbounded liberty to hold just as hard and securely as we please to the practice to which our notions have given birth, all tend to beget an inclination to deal a little more freely with these notions themselves, to canvass them a little, to penetrate a little into their real nature. Flutterings of curiosity, in the foreign sense of the word, appear amongst us, and it is in these that criticism must look to find its account. Criticism first; a time of true creative activity, perhaps,—which, as I have said, must inevitably be preceded amongst us by a time of criticism,—hereafter, when criticism has done its work.

It is of the last importance that English criticism should clearly discern what rule for its course, in order to avail itself of the field now opening to it, and to produce fruit for the future, it ought to take. The rule may be summed up in one word,—disinterested-

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ness. And how is criticism to show disinterestedness? By keeping aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things;' by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches. By steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas, which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them, which perhaps ought often to be attached to them, which in this country at any rate are certain to be attached to them quite sufficiently, but which criticism has really nothing to do with. Its business is, as I have said, simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas. Its business is to do this with inflexible honesty, with due ability; but its business is to do no more, and to leave alone all questions of practical consequences and applications, ques-

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tions which will never fail to have due prominence given to them. Else criticism, besides being really false to its own nature, merely continues in the old rut which it has hitherto followed in this country, and will certainly miss the chance now given to it. For what is at present the bane of criticism in this country? It is that practical considerations cling to it and stifle it. It subserves interests not its own. Our organs of criticism are organs of men and parties having practical ends to serve, and with them those practical ends are the first thing and the play of mind the second; so much play of mind as is compatible with the prosecution of those practical ends is all that is wanted. An organ like the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, having for its main function to understand and utter the best that is known and thought in the world, existing, it may be said, as just an organ for a free play of the mind, we have not. But we have the *Edinburgh*

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Review, existing as an organ of the old Whigs, and for as much play of the mind as may suit its being that; we have the *Quarterly Review*, existing as an organ of the Tories, and for as much play of mind as may suit its being that; we have the *British Quarterly Review*, existing as an organ of the political Dissenters, and for as much play of mind as may suit its being that; we have the *Times*, existing as an organ of the common, satisfied, well-to-do Englishman, and for as much play of mind as may suit its being that. And so on through all the various fractions, political and religious, of our society; every fraction has, as such, its organ of criticism, but the notion of combining all fractions in the common pleasure of a free disinterested play of mind meets with no favour. Directly this play of mind wants to have more scope, and to forget the pressure of practical considerations a little, it is checked, it is made to feel the chain. We saw this

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the other day in the extinction, so much to be regretted, of the *Home and Foreign Review*. Perhaps in no organ of criticism in this country was there so much knowledge, so much play of mind; but these could not save it. The *Dublin Review* subordinates play of mind to the practical business of English and Irish Catholicism, and lives. It must needs be that men should act in sects and parties, that each of these sects and parties should have its organ, and should make this organ subserve the interests of its action; but it would be well, too, that there should be a criticism, not the minister of these interests, not their enemy, but absolutely and entirely independent of them. No other criticism will ever attain any real authority or make any real way towards its end,—the creating a current of true and fresh ideas.

It is because criticism has so little kept in the pure intellectual sphere, has so little detached itself from prac-

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tice, has been so directly polemical and controversial, that it has so ill accomplished, in this country, its best spiritual work; which is to keep man from a self-satisfaction which is retarding and vulgarising, to lead him towards perfection, by making his mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself, and the absolute beauty and fitness of things. A polemical practical criticism makes men blind even to the ideal imperfection of their practice, makes them willingly assert its ideal perfection, in order the better to secure it against attack; and clearly this is narrowing and baneful for them. If they were reassured on the practical side, speculative considerations of ideal perfection they might be brought to entertain, and their spiritual horizon would thus gradually widen. Sir Charles Adderley says to the Warwickshire farmers:—

‘Talk of the improvement of breed! Why, the race we ourselves represent, the men and women, the old Anglo-

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Saxon race, are the best breed in the whole world. . . . The absence of a too enervating climate, too unclouded skies, and a too luxurious nature, has produced so vigorous a race of people, and has rendered us so superior to all the world.'

Mr Roebuck says to the Sheffield cutlers:—

'I look around me and ask what is the state of England? Is not property safe? Is not every man able to say what he likes? Can you not walk from one end of England to the other in perfect security? I ask you whether, the world over or in past history, there is anything like it? Nothing. I pray that our unrivalled happiness may last.'

Now obviously there is a peril for poor human nature in words and thoughts of such exuberant self-satisfaction, until we find ourselves safe in the streets of the Celestial City.

'Das wenige verschwindet leicht dem
Blicke

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Der vorwärts sieht, wie viel noch übrig bleibt—'

says Goethe; 'the little that is done seems nothing when we look forward and see how much we have yet to do.' Clearly this is a better line of reflection for weak humanity, so long as it remains on this earthly field of labour and trial.

But neither Sir Charles Adderley nor Mr Roebuck is by nature inaccessible to considerations of this sort. They only lose sight of them owing to the controversial life we all lead, and the practical form which all speculation takes with us. They have in view opponents whose aim is not ideal, but practical; and in their zeal to uphold their own practice against these innovators, they go so far as even to attribute to this practice an ideal perfection. Somebody has been wanting to introduce a six-pound franchise, or to abolish church-rates, or to collect agricultural statistics by force, or to diminish local

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self-government. How natural, in reply to such proposals, very likely improper or ill-timed, to go a little beyond the mark, and to say stoutly, 'Such a race of people as we stand, so superior to all the world! The old Anglo-Saxon race, the best breed in the whole world! I pray that our unrivalled happiness may last! I ask you whether, the world over or in past history, there is anything like it?' And so long as criticism answers this dithyramb by insisting that the old Anglo-Saxon race would be still more superior to all others if it had no church-rates, or that our unrivalled happiness would last yet longer with a six-pound franchise, so long will the strain, 'The best breed in the whole world!' swell louder and louder, everything ideal and refining will be lost out of sight, and both the assailed and their critics will remain in a sphere, to say the truth, perfectly unvital, a sphere in which spiritual progression is impossible. But

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let criticism leave church-rates and the franchise alone, and in the most candid spirit, without a single lurking thought of practical innovation, confront with our dithyramb this paragraph on which I stumbled in a newspaper immediately after reading Mr Roebuck :—

‘A shocking child murder has just been committed at Nottingham. A girl named Wragg left the workhouse there on Saturday morning with her young illegitimate child. The child was soon afterwards found dead on Mapperly Hills, having been strangled. Wragg is in custody.’

Nothing but that; but, in juxtaposition with the absolute eulogies of Sir Charles Adderley and Mr Roebuck, how eloquent, how suggestive are those few lines! ‘Our old Anglo-Saxon breed, the best in the whole world!’—how much that is harsh and ill-favoured there is in this best! Wragg! If we are to talk of ideal perfection, of ‘the best in the whole world,’ has anyone reflected

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what a touch of grossness in our race, what an original shortcoming in the more delicate spiritual perceptions, is shown by the natural growth amongst us of such hideous names,—Higginbottom, Stiggins, Bugg! In Ionia and Attica they were luckier in this respect than ‘the best race in the world;’ by the Ilissus there was no Wragg, poor thing! And ‘our unrivalled happiness;’—what an element of grimness, bareness, and hideousness mixes with it and blurs it; the workhouse, the dismal Mapperly Hills,—how dismal those who have seen them will remember;—the gloom, the smoke, the cold, the strangled illegitimate child! ‘I ask you whether, the world over or in past history, there is anything like it?’ Perhaps not, one is inclined to answer; but at any rate, in that case, the world is very much to be pitied. And the final touch,—short, bleak, and inhuman: Wragg is in custody. The sex lost in the confusion of our unrivalled

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happiness; or (shall I say?) the superfluous Christian name lopped off by the straightforward vigour of our old Anglo-Saxon breed! There is profit for the spirit in such contrasts as this; criticism serves the cause of perfection by establishing them. By eluding sterile conflict, by refusing to remain in the sphere where alone narrow and relative conceptions have any worth and validity, criticism may diminish its momentary importance, but only in this way has it a chance of gaining admittance for those wider and more perfect conceptions to which all its duty is really owed. Mr Roebuck will have a poor opinion of an adversary who replies to his defiant songs of triumph only by murmuring under his breath, Wragg is in custody; but in no other way will these songs of triumph be induced gradually to moderate themselves, to get rid of what in them is excessive and offensive, and to fall into a softer and truer key.

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It will be said that it is a very subtle and indirect action which I am thus prescribing for criticism, and that, by embracing in this manner the Indian virtue of detachment and abandoning the sphere of practical life, it condemns itself to a slow and obscure work. Slow and obscure it may be, but it is the only proper work of criticism. The mass of mankind will never have any ardent zeal for seeing things as they are; very inadequate ideas will always satisfy them. On these inadequate ideas repose, and must repose, the general practice of the world. That is as much as saying that whoever sets himself to see things as they are will find himself one of a very small circle; but it is only by this small circle resolutely doing its own work that adequate ideas will ever get current at all. The rush and roar of practical life will always have a dizzying and attracting effect upon the most collected spectator, and tend to draw him into its vortex; most of all

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will this be the case where that life is so powerful as it is in England. But it is only by remaining collected, and refusing to lend himself to the point of view of the practical man, that the critic can do the practical man any service; and it is only by the greatest sincerity in pursuing his own course, and by at last convincing even the practical man of his sincerity, that he can escape misunderstandings which perpetually threaten him.

For the practical man is not apt for fine distinctions, and yet in these distinctions truth and the highest culture greatly find their account. But it is not easy to lead a practical man,—unless you reassure him as to your practical intentions, you have no chance of leading him,—to see that a thing which he has always been used to look at from one side only, which he greatly values, and which, looked at from that side, quite deserves, perhaps, all the prizing and admiring which he bestows

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upon it,—that this thing, looked at from another side, may appear much less beneficent and beautiful, and yet retain all its claims to our practical allegiance. Where shall we find language innocent enough, how shall we make the spotless purity of our intentions evident enough, to enable us to say to the political Englishman that the British Constitution itself, which, seen from the practical side, looks such a magnificent organ of progress and virtue, seen from the speculative side, —with its compromises, its love of facts, its horror of theory, its studied avoidance of clear thoughts,—that, seen from this side, our august Constitution sometimes looks,—forgive me, shade of Lord Somers!—a colossal machine for the manufacture of Philistines? How is Cobbett to say this and not be misunderstood, blackened as he is with the smoke of a lifelong conflict in the field of political practice? how is Mr Carlyle to say it and not be misunderstood,

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after his furious raid into this field with his *Latter-day Pamphlets*? how is Mr Ruskin, after his pugnacious political economy? I say, the critic must keep out of the region of immediate practice in the political, social, humanitarian sphere, if he wants to make a beginning for that more free speculative treatment of things, which may perhaps one day make its benefits felt even in this sphere, but in a natural and thence irresistible manner.

Do what he will, however, the critic will still remain exposed to frequent misunderstandings, and nowhere so much as in this country. For here people are particularly indisposed even to comprehend that without this free disinterested treatment of things, truth and the highest culture are out of the question. So immersed are they in practical life, so accustomed to take all their notions from this life and its processes, that they are apt to think that truth and culture themselves can be

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reached by the processes of this life, and that it is an impertinent singularity to think of reaching them in any other. 'We are all *terræ filii*,' cries their eloquent advocate; 'all Philistines together. Away with the notion of proceeding by any other course than the course dear to the Philistines; let us have a social movement, let us organise and combine a party to pursue truth and new thought, let us call it the Liberal party, and let us all stick to each other, and back each other up. Let us have no nonsense about independent criticism, and intellectual delicacy, and the few and the many. Don't let us trouble ourselves about foreign thought; we shall invent the whole thing for ourselves as we go along. If one of us speaks well, applaud him; if one of us speaks ill, applaud him too; we are all in the same movement, we are all liberals, we are all in pursuit of truth.' In this way the pursuit of truth becomes really a social, practical, pleasur-

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able affair, almost requiring a chairman, a secretary, and advertisements ; with the excitement of an occasional scandal, with a little resistance to give the happy sense of difficulty overcome ; but, in general, plenty of bustle and very little thought. To act is so easy, as Goethe says ; to think is so hard ! It is true that the critic has many temptations to go with the stream, to make one of the party movement, one of these *terræ filii* ; it seems ungracious to refuse to be a *terræ filius*, when so many excellent people are ; but the critic's duty is to refuse, or, if resistance is vain, at least to cry with Obermann : *Périssons en résistant*.

How serious a matter it is to try and resist, I had ample opportunity of experiencing when I ventured some time ago to criticise the celebrated first volume of Bishop Colenso. The echoes of the storm which was then raised I still, from time to time, hear grumbling round me. That storm arose out of a

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misunderstanding almost inevitable. It is a result of no little culture to attain to a clear perception that science and religion are two wholly different things. The multitude will for ever confuse them; but happily that is of no great real importance, for while the multitude imagines itself to live by its false science, it does really live by its true religion. Dr Colenso, however, in his first volume did all he could to strengthen the confusion, and to make it dangerous. He did this with the best intentions, I freely admit, and with the most candid ignorance that this was the natural effect of what he was doing; but, says Joubert, 'Ignorance, which in matters of morals extenuates the crime, is itself, in intellectual matters, a crime of the first order.' I criticised Bishop Colenso's speculative confusion. Immediately there was a cry raised: 'What is this? here is a liberal attacking a liberal. Do not you belong to the movement? are not

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you a friend of truth? Is not Bishop Colenso in pursuit of truth? then speak with proper respect of his book. Dr Stanley is another friend of truth, and you speak with proper respect of his book; why make these invidious differences? both books are excellent, admirable, liberal; Bishop Colenso's perhaps the most so, because it is the boldest, and will have the best practical consequences for the liberal cause. Do you want to encourage to the attack of a brother liberal his, and your, and our implacable enemies, the *Church and State Review* or the *Record*,—the High Church rhinoceros and the Evangelical hyæna? Be silent, therefore; or rather speak, speak as loud as ever you can! and go into ecstasies over the eighty and odd pigeons.'

But criticism cannot follow this coarse and indiscriminate method. It is unfortunately possible for a man in pursuit of truth to write a book which reposes upon a false conception. Even

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the practical consequences of a book are to genuine criticism no recommendation of it, if the book is, in the highest sense, blundering. I see that a lady who herself, too, is in pursuit of truth, and who writes with great ability, but a little too much, perhaps, under the influence of the practical spirit of the English liberal movement, classes Bishop Colenso's book and M. Renan's together, in her survey of the religious state of Europe, as facts of the same order, works, both of them, of 'great importance;' 'great ability, power, and skill;' Bishop Colenso's, perhaps, the most powerful; at least, Miss Cobbe gives special expression to her gratitude that to Bishop Colenso 'has been given the strength to grasp, and the courage to teach, truths of such deep import.' In the same way, more than one popular writer has compared him to Luther. Now it is just this kind of false estimate which the critical spirit is, it seems to me, bound to resist. It

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is really the strongest possible proof of the low ebb at which, in England, the critical spirit is, that while the critical hit in the religious literature of Germany is Dr Strauss's book, in that of France M. Renan's book, the book of Bishop Colenso is the critical hit in the religious literature of England. Bishop Colenso's book reposes on a total misconception of the essential elements of the religious problem, as that problem is now presented for solution. To criticism, therefore, which seeks to have the best that is known and thought on this problem, it is, however well meant, of no importance whatever. M. Renan's book attempts a new synthesis of the elements furnished to us by the Four Gospels. It attempts, in my opinion, a synthesis, perhaps premature, perhaps impossible, certainly not successful. Up to the present time, at any rate, we must acquiesce in Fleury's sentence on such recastings of the Gospel-story: *Quiconque s'imagine la pouvoir mieux*

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écrire, ne l'entend pas. M. Renan had himself passed by anticipation a like sentence on his own work, when he said: 'If a new presentation of the character of Jesus were offered to me, I would not have it; its very clearness would be, in my opinion, the best proof of its insufficiency.' His friends may with perfect justice rejoin that at the sight of the Holy Land, and of the actual scene of the Gospel-story, all the current of M. Renan's thoughts may have naturally changed, and a new casting of that story irresistibly suggested itself to him; and that this is just a case for applying Cicero's maxim: Change of mind is not inconsistency—*nemo doctus unquam mutationem consilii inconstantiam dixit esse.* Nevertheless, for criticism, M. Renan's first thought must still be the truer one, as long as his new casting so fails more fully to commend itself, more fully (to use Coleridge's happy phrase about the Bible) to find us. Still M. Renan's at-

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tempt is, for criticism, of the most real interest and importance, since, with all its difficulty, a fresh synthesis of the New Testament *data*,—not a making war on them, in Voltaire's fashion, not a leaving them out of mind, in the world's fashion, but the putting a new construction upon them, the taking them from under the old, traditional, conventional point of view and placing them under a new one,—is the very essence of the religious problem, as now presented; and only by efforts in this direction can it receive a solution.

Again, in the same spirit in which she judges Bishop Colenso, Miss Cobbe, like so many earnest liberals of our practical race, both here and in America, herself sets vigorously about a positive reconstruction of religion, about making a religion of the future out of hand, or at least setting about making it. We must not rest, she and they are always thinking and saying, in negative criticism, we must be creative and con-

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structive; hence we have such works as her recent *Religious Duty*, and works still more considerable, perhaps, by others, which will be in every one's mind. These works often have much ability; they often spring out of sincere convictions, and a sincere wish to do good; and they sometimes, perhaps, do good. Their fault is (if I may be permitted to say so) one which they have in common with the British College of Health, in the New Road. Everyone knows the British College of Health; it is that building with the lion and the statue of the Goddess Hygeia before it; at least I am sure about the lion, though I am not absolutely certain about the Goddess Hygeia. This building does credit, perhaps, to the resources of Dr Morrison and his disciples; but it falls a good deal short of one's idea of what a British College of Health ought to be. In England, where we hate public interference and love individual enterprise, we have a whole

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crop of places like the British College of Health; the grand name without the grand thing. Unluckily, creditable to individual enterprise as they are, they tend to impair our taste by making us forget what more grandiose, noble, or beautiful character properly belongs to a public institution. The same may be said of the religions of the future of Miss Cobbe and others. Creditable, like the British College of Health, to the resources of their authors, they yet tend to make us forget what more grandiose, noble, or beautiful character properly belongs to religious constructions. The historic religions, with all their faults, have had this; it certainly belongs to the religious sentiment, when it truly flowers, to have this; and we impoverish our spirit if we allow a religion of the future without it. What then is the duty of criticism here? To take the practical point of view, to applaud the liberal movement and all its works,—its New Road religions of

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the future into the bargain,—for their general utility's sake? By no means; but to be perpetually dissatisfied with these works, while they perpetually fall short of a high and perfect ideal.

For criticism, these are elementary laws; but they never can be popular, and in this country they have been very little followed, and one meets with immense obstacles in following them. That is a reason for asserting them again and again. Criticism must maintain its independence of the practical spirit and its aims. Even with well-meant efforts of the practical spirit it must express dissatisfaction, if in the sphere of the ideal they seem impoverishing and limiting. It must not hurry on to the goal because of its practical importance. It must be patient, and know how to wait; and flexible, and know how to attach itself to things and how to withdraw from them. It must be apt to study and praise elements that for the fulness of spiritual

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perfection are wanted, even though they belong to a power which in the practical sphere may be maleficent. It must be apt to discern the spiritual shortcomings or illusions of powers that in the practical sphere may be beneficent. And this without any notion of favouring or injuring, in the practical sphere, one power or the other; without any notion of playing off, in this sphere, one power against the other. When one looks, for instance, at the English Divorce Court,—an institution which perhaps has its practical conveniences, but which in the ideal sphere is so hideous; an institution which neither makes divorce impossible nor makes it decent, which allows a man to get rid of his wife, or a wife of her husband, but makes them drag one another first, for the public edification, through a mire of unutterable infamy,—when one looks at this charming institution, I say, with its crowded trials, its newspaper reports, and its money compensations, this insti-

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tution in which the gross unregenerate British Philistine has indeed stamped an image of himself,—one may be permitted to find the marriage theory of Catholicism refreshing and elevating. Or when Protestantism, in virtue of its supposed rational and intellectual origin, gives the law to criticism too magisterially, criticism may and must remind it that its pretensions, in this respect, are illusive and do it harm; that the Reformation was a moral rather than an intellectual event; that Luther's theory of grace no more exactly reflects the mind of the spirit than Bossuet's philosophy of history reflects it; and that there is no more antecedent probability of the Bishop of Durham's stock of ideas being agreeable to perfect reason than of Pope Pius the Ninth's. But criticism will not on that account forget the achievements of Protestantism in the practical and moral sphere; nor that, even in the intellectual sphere, Protestantism, though in a blind and stumbling

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manner, carried forward the Renaissance, while Catholicism threw itself violently across its path.

I lately heard a man of thought and energy contrasting the want of ardour and movement which he now found amongst young men in this country with what he remembered in his own youth, twenty years ago. 'What reformers we were then!' he exclaimed; 'what a zeal we had! how we canvassed every institution in Church and State, and were prepared to remodel them all on first principles!' He was inclined to regret, as a spiritual flagging, the lull which he saw. I am disposed rather to regard it as a pause in which the turn to a new mode of spiritual progress is being accomplished. Everything was long seen, by the young and ardent amongst us, in inseparable connection with politics and practical life. We have pretty well exhausted the benefits of seeing things in this connection, we have got all that can be got by so seeing

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them. Let us try a more disinterested mode of seeing them; let us betake ourselves more to the serener life of the mind and spirit. This life, too, may have its excesses and dangers; but they are not for us at present. Let us think of quietly enlarging our stock of true and fresh ideas, and not, as soon as we get an idea or half an idea, be running out with it into the street, and trying to make it rule there. Our ideas will, in the end, shape the world all the better for maturing a little. Perhaps in fifty years' time it will in the English House of Commons be an objection to an institution that it is an anomaly, and my friend the Member of Parliament will shudder in his grave. But let us in the meanwhile rather endeavour that in twenty years' time it may, in English literature, be an objection to a proposition that it is absurd. That will be a change so vast, that the imagination almost fails to grasp it. *Ab integro sæclorum nascitur ordo.*

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If I have insisted so much on the course which criticism must take where politics and religion are concerned, it is because, where these burning matters are in question, it is most likely to go astray. I have wished, above all, to insist on the attitude which criticism should adopt towards things in general ; on its right tone and temper of mind. But then comes another question as to the subject-matter which literary criticism should most seek. Here, in general, its course is determined for it by the idea which is the law of its being ; the idea of a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas. By the very nature of things, as England is not all the world, much of the best that is known and thought in the world cannot be of English growth, must be foreign ; by the nature of things, again, it is just this that we are least likely to know, while English thought

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is streaming in upon us from all sides, and takes excellent care that we shall not be ignorant of its existence. The English critic of literature, therefore, must dwell much on foreign thought, and with particular heed on any part of it, which, while significant and fruitful in itself, is for any reason specially likely to escape him. Again, judging is often spoken of as the critic's one business, and so in some sense it is; but the judgment which almost insensibly forms itself in a fair and clear mind, along with fresh knowledge, is the valuable one; and thus knowledge, and ever fresh knowledge, must be the critic's great concern for himself. And it is by communicating fresh knowledge, and letting his own judgment pass along with it,—but insensibly, and in the second place, not the first, as a sort of companion and clue, not as an abstract law-giver,—that the critic will generally do most good to his readers. Sometimes, no doubt, for the sake of establishing

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an author's place in literature, and his relation to a central standard (and if this is not done, how are we to get at our *best in the world*?) criticism may have to deal with a subject-matter so familiar that fresh knowledge is out of the question, and then it must be all judgment; an enunciation and detailed application of principles. Here the great safeguard is never to let oneself become abstract, always to retain an intimate and lively consciousness of the truth of what one is saying, and, the moment this fails us, to be sure that something is wrong. Still, under all circumstances, this mere judgment and application of principles is, in itself, not the most satisfactory work to the critic; like mathematics, it is tautological, and cannot well give us, like fresh learning, the sense of creative activity.

But stop, someone will say; all this talk is of no practical use to us whatever; this criticism of yours is not what we have in our minds when we speak of

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criticism ; when we speak of critics and criticism, we mean critics and criticism of the current English literature of the day ; when you offer to tell criticism its function, it is to this criticism that we expect you to address yourself. I am sorry for it, for I am afraid I must disappoint these expectations. I am bound by my own definition of criticism : a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. How much of current English literature comes into this 'best that is known and thought in the world' ? Not very much, I fear ; certainly less, at this moment, than of the current literature of France or Germany. Well, then, am I to alter my definition of criticism, in order to meet the requirements of a number of practising English critics, who, after all, are free in their choice of a business ? That would be making criticism lend itself just to one of those alien practical considerations, which, I

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have said, are so fatal to it. One may say, indeed, to those who have to deal with the mass—so much better disregarded—of current English literature, that they may at all events endeavour, in dealing with this, to try it, so far as they can, by the standard of the best that is known and thought in the world; one may say, that to get anywhere near this standard, every critic should try and possess one great literature, at least, besides his own; and the more unlike his own, the better. But, after all, the criticism I am really concerned with,—the criticism which alone can much help us for the future, the criticism which, throughout Europe, is at the present day meant, when so much stress is laid on the importance of criticism and the critical spirit,—is a criticism which regards Europe as being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes, one great confederation, bound to a joint action and working to a common result; and whose members have, for their

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proper outfit, a knowledge of Greek, Roman, and Eastern antiquity, and of one another. Special, local, and temporary advantages being put out of account, that modern nation will in the intellectual and spiritual sphere make most progress, which most thoroughly carries out this programme. And what is that but saying that we too, all of us, as individuals, the more thoroughly we carry it out, shall make the more progress?

There is so much inviting us!—what are we to take? what will nourish us in growth towards perfection? That is the question which, with the immense field of life and of literature lying before him, the critic has to answer; for himself first, and afterwards for others. In this idea of the critic's business the essays brought together in the following pages have had their origin; in this idea, widely different as are their subjects, they have, perhaps, their unity.

I conclude with what I said at the beginning: to have the sense of creative

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activity is the great happiness and the great proof of being alive, and it is not denied to criticism to have it; but then criticism must be sincere, simple, flexible, ardent, ever widening its knowledge. Then it may have, in no contemptible measure, a joyful sense of creative activity; a sense which a man of insight and conscience will prefer to what he might derive from a poor, starved, fragmentary, inadequate creation. And at some epochs no other creation is possible.

Still, in full measure, the sense of creative activity belongs only to genuine creation; in literature we must never forget that. But what true man of letters ever can forget it? It is no such common matter for a gifted nature to come into possession of a current of true and living ideas, and to produce amidst the inspiration of them, that we are likely to underrate it. The epochs of Æschylus and Shakspeare make us feel their pre-eminence. In an epoch like those is, no doubt, the true life of

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literature; there is the promised land, towards which criticism can only beckon. That promised land it will not be ours to enter, and we shall die in the wilderness; but to have desired to enter it, to have saluted it from afar, is already, perhaps, the best distinction among contemporaries; it will certainly be the best title to esteem with posterity.

THE LITERARY INFLUENCE
OF ACADEMIES

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It is impossible to put down a book like the history of the French Academy, by Pellisson and D'Olivet, which M. Charles Livet has lately re-edited, without being led to reflect upon the absence, in our own country, of any institution like the French Academy, upon the probable causes of this absence, and upon its results. A thousand voices will be ready to tell us that this absence is a signal mark of our national superiority; that it is in great part owing to this absence that the exhilarating words of Lord Macaulay, lately given to the world by his very clever nephew, Mr Trevelyan, are so profoundly true: 'It may safely be said that the literature now extant in the English language is of far greater

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value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together.' I daresay this is so; only, remembering Spinoza's maxim that the two great banes of humanity are self-conceit and the laziness coming from self-conceit, I think it may do us good, instead of resting in our pre-eminence with perfect security, to look a little more closely why this is so, and whether it is so without any limitations.

But first of all I must give a very few words to the outward history of the French Academy. About the year 1629, seven or eight persons in Paris, fond of literature, formed themselves into a sort of little club to meet at one another's houses and discuss literary matters. Their meetings got talked of, and Cardinal Richelieu, then minister and all-powerful, heard of them. He himself had a noble passion for letters, and for all fine culture; he was interested by what he heard of the nascent

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society. Himself a man in the grand style, if ever man was, he had the insight to perceive what a potent instrument of the grand style was here to his hand. It was the beginning of a great century for France, the seventeenth; men's minds were working, the French language was forming. Richelieu sent to ask the members of the new society whether they would be willing to become a body with a public character, holding regular meetings. Not without a little hesitation,—for apparently they found themselves very well as they were, and these seven or eight gentlemen of a social and literary turn were not perfectly at their ease as to what the great and terrible minister could want with them,—they consented. The favours of a man like Richelieu are not easily refused, whether they are honestly meant or no; but this favour of Richelieu's was meant quite honestly. The Parliament, however, had its doubts of this. The Parliament had none of

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Richelieu's enthusiasm about letters and culture; it was jealous of the apparition of a new public body in the State; above all, of a body called into existence by Richelieu. The King's letters-patent, establishing and authorising the new society, were granted early in 1635; but, by the old constitution of France, these letters-patent required the verification of the Parliament. It was two years and a half—towards the autumn of 1637—before the Parliament would give it; and it then gave it only after pressing solicitations, and earnest assurances of the innocent intentions of the young Academy. Jocose people said that this society, with its mission to purify and embellish the language, filled with terror a body of lawyers like the French Parliament, the stronghold of barbarous jargon and of chicane.

This improvement of the language was in truth the declared grand aim for the operations of the Academy. Its statutes of foundation, approved by

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Richelieu before the royal edict establishing it was issued, say expressly: 'The Academy's principal function shall be to work with all the care and all the diligence possible at giving sure rules to our language, and rendering it pure, eloquent, and capable of treating the arts and sciences.' This zeal for making a nation's great instrument of thought,—its language,—correct and worthy, is undoubtedly a sign full of promise,—a weighty earnest of future power. It is said that Richelieu had it in his mind that French should succeed Latin in its general ascendancy, as Latin had succeeded Greek; if it was so, even this wish has to some extent been fulfilled. But, at any rate, the ethical influences of style in language,—its close relations, so often pointed out, with character,—are most important. Richelieu, a man of high culture, and, at the same time, of great character, felt them profoundly; and that he should have sought to regularise, strengthen, and perpetuate them

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by an institution for perfecting language, is alone a striking proof of his governing spirit and of his genius.

This was not all he had in his mind, however. The new Academy, now enlarged to a body of forty members, and meant to contain all the chief literary men of France, was to be a literary tribunal. The works of its members were to be brought before it previous to publication, were to be criticised by it, and finally, if it saw fit, to be published with its declared approbation. The works of other writers, not members of the Academy, might also, at the request of these writers themselves, be passed under the Academy's review. Besides this, in essays and discussions the Academy examined and judged works already published, whether by living or dead authors, and literary matters in general. The celebrated opinion on Corneille's 'Cid,' delivered in 1637 by the Academy at Richelieu's urgent request, when this poem, which strongly occu-

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pied public attention, had been attacked by M. de Scudéry, shows how fully Richelieu designed his new creation to do duty as a supreme court of literature, and how early it in fact began to exercise this function. One who had known Richelieu declared, after the Cardinal's death, that he had projected a yet greater institution than the Academy, a sort of grand European college of art, science, and literature, a Prytaneum, where the chief authors of all Europe should be gathered together in one central home, there to live in security, leisure, and honour;—that was a dream which will not bear to be pulled about too roughly. But the project of forming a high court of letters for France was no dream; Richelieu in great measure fulfilled it. This is what the Academy, by its idea, really is; this is what it has always tended to become; this is what it has, from time to time, really been; by being, or tending to be this, far more than even by what it has

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done for the language, it is of such importance in France. To give the law, the tone to literature, and that tone a high one, is its business. 'Richelieu meant it,' says M. Sainte-Beuve, 'to be a *haut jury*,'—a jury the most choice and authoritative that could be found on all important literary matters in question before the public; to be, as it in fact became in the latter half of the eighteenth century, 'a sovereign organ of opinion.' 'The duty of the Academy is,' says M. Renan, '*maintenir la délicatesse de l'esprit français*'—to keep the fine quality of the French spirit unimpaired; it represents a kind of '*maîtrise en fait de bon ton*'—the authority of a recognised master in matters of tone and taste. 'All ages,' says M. Renan again, 'have had their inferior literature; but the great danger of our time is that this inferior literature tends more and more to get the upper place. No one has the same advantage as the Academy for fighting against this mis-

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chief'; the Academy, which, as he says elsewhere, has even special facilities for 'creating a form of intellectual culture which shall impose itself on all around.' M. Sainte-Beuve and M. Renan are, both of them, very keen-sighted critics; and they show it signally by seizing and putting so prominently forward this character of the French Academy.

Such an effort to set up a recognised authority, imposing on us a high standard in matters of intellect and taste, has many enemies in human nature. We all of us like to go our own way, and not to be forced out of the atmosphere of commonplace habitual to most of us;—'*was uns alle bündigt*,' says Goethe, '*das Gemeine*.' We like to be suffered to lie comfortably in the old straw of our habits, especially of our intellectual habits, even though this straw may not be very clean and fine. But if the effort to limit this freedom of our lower nature finds, as it does and must find, enemies in human nature, it

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finds also auxiliaries in it. Out of the four great parts, says Cicero, of the *honestum*, or good, which forms the matter on which *officium*, or human duty, finds employment, one is the fixing of a *modus* and an *ordo*, a measure and an order, to fashion and wholesomely constrain our action, in order to lift it above the level it keeps if left to itself, and to bring it nearer to perfection. Man alone of living creatures, he says, goes feeling after '*quid sit ordo, quid sit quod deceat, in factis dictisque qui modus*—the discovery of an order, a law of good taste, a measure for his words and actions.' Other creatures submissively follow the law of their nature; man alone has an impulse leading him to set up some other law to control the bent of his nature.

This holds good, of course, as to moral matters, as well as intellectual matters: and it is of moral matters that we are generally thinking when we affirm it. But it holds good as to intellectual

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matters too. Now, probably, M. Sainte-Beuve had not these words of Cicero in his mind when he made, about the French nation, the assertion I am going to quote ; but, for all that, the assertion leans for support, one may say, upon the truth conveyed in those words of Cicero, and wonderfully illustrates and confirms them. ‘In France,’ says M. Sainte-Beuve, ‘the first consideration for us is not whether we are amused and pleased by a work of art or mind, nor is it whether we are touched by it. What we seek above all to learn is, whether we were right in being amused with it, and in applauding it, and in being moved by it.’ Those are very remarkable words, and they are, I believe, in the main quite true. A Frenchman has, to a considerable degree, what one may call a conscience in intellectual matters ; he has an active belief that there is a right and a wrong in them, that he is bound to honour and obey the right, that he is disgraced by cleav-

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ing to the wrong. All the world has, or professes to have, this conscience in moral matters. The word conscience has become almost confined, in popular use, to the moral sphere, because this lively susceptibility of feeling is, in the moral sphere, so far more common than in the intellectual sphere; the livelier, in the moral sphere, this susceptibility is, the greater becomes a man's readiness to admit a high standard of action, an ideal authoritatively correcting his everyday moral habits; here, such willing admission of authority is due to sensitiveness of conscience. And a like deference to a standard higher than one's own habitual standard in intellectual matters, a like respectful recognition of a superior ideal, is caused, in the intellectual sphere, by sensitiveness of intelligence. Those whose intelligence is quickest, openest, most sensitive, are readiest with this deference; those whose intelligence is less delicate and sensitive are less disposed to it.

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Well, now we are on the road to see why the French have their Academy and we have nothing of the kind.

What are the essential characteristics of the spirit of our nation? Not, certainly, an open and clear mind, not a quick and flexible intelligence. Our greatest admirers would not claim for us that we have these in a pre-eminent degree; they might say that we had more of them than our detractors gave us credit for; but they would not assert them to be our essential characteristics. They would rather allege, as our chief spiritual characteristics, energy and honesty; and, if we are judged favourably and positively, not invidiously and negatively, our chief characteristics are, no doubt, these:—energy and honesty, not an open and clear mind, not a quick and flexible intelligence. Openness of mind and flexibility of intelligence were very signal characteristics of the Athenian people in ancient times; everybody will feel that. Openness of

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mind and flexibility of intelligence are remarkable characteristics of the French people in modern times; at any rate, they strikingly characterise them as compared with us; I think everybody, or almost everybody, will feel that. I will not now ask what more the Athenian or the French spirit has than this, nor what shortcomings either of them may have as a set-off against this; all I want now to point out is that they have this, and that we have it in a much lesser degree.

Let me remark, however, that not only in the moral sphere, but also in the intellectual and spiritual sphere, energy and honesty are most important and fruitful qualities; that, for instance, of what we call genius energy is the most essential part. So, by assigning to a nation energy and honesty as its chief spiritual characteristics,—by refusing to it, as at all eminent characteristics, openness of mind and flexibility of intelligence,—we do not by any means, as some people might at first suppose, relegate its im-

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portance and its power of manifesting itself with effect from the intellectual to the moral sphere. We only indicate its probable special line of successful activity in the intellectual sphere, and, it is true, certain imperfections and failings to which in this sphere, it will always be subject. Genius is mainly an affair of energy, and poetry is mainly an affair of genius; therefore, a nation whose spirit is characterised by energy may well be eminent in poetry;—and we have Shakspeare. Again, the highest reach of science is, one may say, an inventive power, a faculty of divination, akin to the highest power exercised in poetry; therefore, a nation whose spirit is characterised by energy may well be eminent in science;—and we have Newton. Shakspeare and Newton: in the intellectual sphere there can be no higher names. And what that energy, which is the life of genius, above everything demands and insists upon, is freedom; entire independence of all authority,

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prescription, and routine,—the fullest room to expand as it will. Therefore, a nation whose chief spiritual characteristic is energy, will not be very apt to set up, in intellectual matters, a fixed standard, an authority, like an academy. By this it certainly escapes certain real inconveniences and dangers, and it can, at the same time, as we have seen, reach undeniably splendid heights in poetry and science. On the other hand, some of the requisites of intellectual work are specially the affair of quickness of mind and flexibility of intelligence. The form, the method of evolution, the precision, the proportions, the relations of the parts to the whole, in an intellectual work, depend mainly upon them. And these are the elements of an intellectual work which are really most communicable from it, which can most be learned and adopted from it, which have, therefore, the greatest effect upon the intellectual performance of others. Even in poetry, these

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requisites are very important; and the poetry of a nation, not eminent for the gifts on which they depend, will, more or less, suffer by this shortcoming. In poetry, however, they are, after all, secondary, and energy is the first thing; but in prose they are of first-rate importance. In its prose literature, therefore, and in the routine of intellectual work generally, a nation with no particular gifts for these will not be so successful. These are what, as I have said, can to a certain degree be learned and appropriated, while the free activity of genius cannot. Academies consecrate and maintain them, and, therefore, a nation with an eminent turn for them naturally establishes academies. So far as routine and authority tend to embarrass energy and inventive genius, academies may be said to be obstructive to energy and inventive genius, and, to this extent, to the human spirit's general advance. But then this evil is so much compensated by the propagation, on a

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large scale, of the mental aptitudes and demands which an open mind and a flexible intelligence naturally engender, genius itself, in the long run, so greatly finds its account in this propagation, and bodies like the French Academy have such power for promoting it, that the general advance of the human spirit is perhaps, on the whole, rather furthered than impeded by their existence.

How much greater is our nation in poetry than prose! how much better, in general, do the productions of its spirit show in the qualities of genius than in the qualities of intelligence! One may constantly remark this in the work of individuals; how much more striking, in general, does any Englishman,—of some vigour of mind, but by no means a poet,—seem in his verse than in his prose! His verse partly suffers from his not being really a poet, partly, no doubt, from the very same defects which impair his prose, and he cannot express himself with thorough

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success in it. But how much more powerful a personage does he appear in it, by dint of feeling, and of originality and movement of ideas, than when he is writing prose! With a Frenchman of like stamp, it is just the reverse: set him to write poetry, he is limited, artificial, and impotent; set him to write prose, he is free, natural, and effective. The power of French literature is in its prose-writers, the power of English literature is in its poets. Nay, many of the celebrated French poets depend wholly for their fame upon the qualities of intelligence which they exhibit, — qualities which are the distinctive support of prose; many of the celebrated English prose-writers depend wholly for their fame upon the qualities of genius and imagination which they exhibit, — qualities which are the distinctive support of poetry. But, as I have said, the qualities of genius are less transferable than the qualities of intelligence; less can

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be immediately learned and appropriated from their product; they are less direct and stringent intellectual agencies, though they may be more beautiful and divine. Shakspeare and our great Elizabethan group were certainly more gifted writers than Corneille and his group; but what was the sequel to this great literature, this literature of genius, as we may call it, stretching from Marlowe to Milton? What did it lead up to in English literature? To our provincial and second-rate literature of the eighteenth century. What on the other hand, was the sequel to the literature of the French 'great century,' to this literature of intelligence, as, by comparison with our Elizabethan literature, we may call it; what did it lead up to? To the French literature of the eighteenth century, one of the most powerful and pervasive intellectual agencies that have ever existed,—the greatest European force of the eighteenth century. In science,

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again, we had Newton, a genius of the very highest order, a type of genius in science, if ever there was one. On the continent, as a sort of counterpart to Newton, there was Leibnitz; a man, it seems to me (though on these matters I speak under correction), of much less creative energy of genius, much less power of divination than Newton, but rather a man of admirable intelligence, a type of intelligence in science, if ever there was one. Well, and what did they each directly lead up to in science? What was the intellectual generation that sprang from each of them? I only repeat what the men of science have themselves pointed out. The man of genius was continued by the English analysts of the eighteenth century, comparatively powerless and obscure followers of the renowned master. The man of intelligence was continued by successors like Bernouilli, Euler, Lagrange, and Laplace, the greatest names in modern mathematics.

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What I want the reader to see is, that the question as to the utility of academies to the intellectual life of a nation is not settled when we say, for instance: 'Oh, we have never had an academy, and yet we have, confessedly, a very great literature.' It still remains to be asked: 'What sort of a great literature? a literature great in the special qualities of genius, or great in the special qualities of intelligence?' If in the former, it is by no means sure that either our literature, or the general intellectual life of our nation, has got already, without academies, all that academies can give. Both the one and the other may very well be somewhat wanting in those qualities of intelligence out of a lively sense for which a body like the French Academy, as I have said, springs, and which such a body does a great deal to spread and confirm. Our literature, in spite of the genius manifested in it, may fall short in form, method, precision, proportions,

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arrangement,—all of them, I have said, things where intelligence proper comes in. It may be comparatively weak in prose, that branch of literature where intelligence proper is, so to speak, all in all. In this branch it may show many grave faults to which the want of a quick, flexible intelligence, and of the strict standard which such an intelligence tends to impose, makes it liable; it may be full of hap-hazard, crudeness, provincialism, eccentricity, violence, blundering. It may be a less stringent and effective intellectual agency, both upon our own nation and upon the world at large, than other literatures which show less genius, perhaps, but more intelligence.

The right conclusion certainly is that we should try, so far as we can, to make up our shortcomings; and that to this end, instead of always fixing our thoughts upon the points in which our literature, and our intellectual life generally, are strong, we should, from

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time to time, fix them upon those in which they are weak, and so learn to perceive clearly what we have to amend. What is our second great spiritual character,—our honesty,—good for, if it is not good for this? But it will,—I am sure it will,—more and more, as time goes on, be found good for this.

Well, then, an institution like the French Academy,—an institution owing its existence to a national bent towards the things of the mind, towards culture, towards clearness, correctness, and propriety in thinking and speaking, and, in its turn, promoting this bent,—sets standards in a number of directions, and creates, in all these directions, a force of educated opinion, checking and rebuking those who fall below these standards, or who set them at nought. Educated opinion exists here as in France; but in France the Academy serves as a sort of centre and rallying-point to it, and gives it a force which it has not got here. Why

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is all the journeyman-work of literature, as I may call it, so much worse done here than it is in France? I do not wish to hurt anyone's feelings; but surely this is so. Think of the difference between our books of reference and those of the French, between our biographical dictionaries (to take a striking instance) and theirs; think of the difference between the translations of the classics turned out for Mr Bohn's library and those turned out for M. Nisard's collection! As a general rule, hardly any one amongst us, who knows French and German well, would use an English book of reference when he could get a French or German one; or would look at an English prose translation of an ancient author when he could get a French or German one. It is not that there do not exist in England, as in France, a number of people perfectly well able to discern what is good, in these things, from what is bad, and preferring what is good; but they

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are isolated, they form no powerful body of opinion, they are not strong enough to set a standard, up to which even the journeyman-work of literature must be brought, if it is to be vendible. Ignorance and charlatanism in work of this kind are always trying to pass off their wares as excellent, and to cry down criticism as the voice of an insignificant, over-fastidious minority; they easily persuade the multitude that this is so when the minority is scattered about as it is here; not so easily when it is banded together as in the French Academy. So, again, with freaks in dealing with language; certainly all such freaks tend to impair the power and beauty of language; and how far more common they are with us than with the French! To take a very familiar instance. Every one has noticed the way in which the *Times* chooses to spell the word 'diocese'; it always spells it diocess, deriving it, I suppose, from *Zeus* and

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census. The *Journal des Debats* might just as well write 'diocess' instead of 'diocèse,' but imagine the *Journal des Debats* doing so! Imagine an educated Frenchman indulging himself in an orthographical antic of this sort, in face of the grave respect with which the Academy and its dictionary invest the French language! Some people will say these are little things; they are not; they are of bad example. They tend to spread the baneful notion that there is no such thing as a high, correct standard in intellectual matters; that every one may as well take his own way; they are at variance with the severe discipline necessary for all real culture; they confirm us in habits of wilfulness and eccentricity, which hurt our minds, and damage our credit with serious people. The late Mr Donaldson was certainly a man of great ability, and I, who am not an Orientalist, do not pretend to judge his 'Jashar': but let the reader observe

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the form which a foreign Orientalist's judgment of it naturally takes. M. Renan calls it a *tentative malheureuse*, a failure, in short; this it may be, or it may not be; I am no judge. But he goes on: 'It is astonishing that a recent article' (in a French periodical, he means) 'should have brought forward as the last word of German exegesis a work like this, composed by a doctor of the University of Cambridge, and universally condemned by German critics.' You see what he means to imply: an extravagance of this sort could never have come from Germany, where there is a great force of critical opinion controlling a learned man's vagaries, and keeping him straight; it comes from the native home of intellectual eccentricity of all kinds,—from England, from a doctor of the University of Cambridge:—and I daresay he would not expect much better things from a doctor of the University of Oxford. Again, after speaking of what Germany and

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France have done for the history of Mahomet: 'America and England,' M. Renan goes on, 'have also occupied themselves with Mahomet.' He mentions Washington Irving's 'Life of Mahomet,' which does not, he says, evince much of an historical sense, a *sentiment historique fort élevé*; 'but,' he proceeds, 'this book shows a real progress, when one thinks that in 1829 Mr Charles Forster published two thick volumes, which enchanted the English *reverends*, to make out that Mahomet was the little horn of the he-goat that figures in the eighth chapter of Daniel, and that the Pope was the great horn. Mr Forster founded on this ingenious parallel a whole philosophy of history, according to which the Pope represented the Western corruption of Christianity, and Mahomet the Eastern; thence the striking resemblances between Mahometanism and Popery.' And in a note M. Renan adds: 'This is the same Mr Charles Forster who is the author of a

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mystification about the Sinaitic inscriptions, in which he declares he finds the primitive language.' As much as to say: 'It is an Englishman, be surprised at no extravagance.' If these innuendoes had no ground, and were made in hatred and malice, they would not be worth a moment's attention; but they come from a grave Orientalist, on his own subject, and they point to a real fact;—the absence, in this country, of any force of educated literary and scientific opinion, making aberrations like those of the author of 'The One Primeval Language' out of the question. Not only the author of such aberrations, often a very clever man, suffers by the want of check, by the not being kept straight, and spends force in vain on a false road, which, under better discipline, he might have used with profit on a true one; but all his adherents, both 'reverends' and others, suffer too, and the general rate of information and judgment is in this way kept low.

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In a production which we have all been reading lately, a production stamped throughout with a literary quality very rare in this country, and of which I shall have a word to say presently — urbanity; in this production, the work of a man never to be named by any son of Oxford without sympathy, a man who alone in Oxford of his generation, alone of many generations, conveyed to us in his genius that same charm, that same ineffable sentiment which this exquisite place itself conveys,—I mean Dr Newman,—an expression is frequently used which is more common in theological than in literary language, but which seems to me fitted to be of general service; the note of so and so, the note of catholicity, the note of antiquity, the note of sanctity, and so on. Adopting this expressive word, I say that in the bulk of the intellectual work of a nation which has no centre, no intellectual metropolis like an academy, like M. Sainte-Beuve's

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‘sovereign organ of opinion,’ like M. Renan’s ‘recognised authority in matters of tone and taste’—there is observable a note of provinciality. Now to get rid of provinciality is a certain stage of culture; a stage the positive result of which we must not make of too much importance, but which is, nevertheless, indispensable, for it brings us on to the platform where alone the best and highest intellectual work can be said fairly to begin. Work done after men have reached this platform is classical; and that is the only work which, in the long run, can stand. All the *scoriæ* in the work of men of great genius who have not lived on this platform are due to their not having lived on it. Genius raises them to it by moments, and the portions of their work which are immortal are done at these moments; but more of it would have been immortal if they had not reached this platform at moments only, if they had had the culture which makes men live there.

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The less a literature has felt the influence of a supposed centre of correct information, correct judgment, correct taste, the more we shall find in it this note of provinciality. I have shown the note of provinciality as caused by remoteness from a centre of correct information. Of course the note of provinciality from the want of a centre of correct taste is still more visible, and it is also still more common. For here great—even the greatest—powers of mind most fail a man. Great powers of mind will make him inform himself thoroughly, great powers of mind will make him think profoundly, even with ignorance and platitude all round him; but not even great powers of mind will keep his taste and style perfectly sound and sure, if he is left too much to himself, with no ‘sovereign organ of opinion’ in these matters near him. Even men like Jeremy Taylor and Burke suffer here. Take this passage from Taylor’s funeral sermon on Lady Carbery:—

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‘So have I seen a river, deep and smooth, passing with a still foot and a sober face, and paying to the *fiscus*, the great exchequer of the sea, a tribute large and full; and hard by it a little brook, skipping and making a noise upon its unequal and neighbour bottom; and after all its talking and bragged motion, it paid to its common audit no more than the revenues of a little cloud or a contemptible vessel: so have I sometimes compared the issues of her religion to the solemnities and famed outsides of another’s piety.’

That passage has been much admired, and, indeed, the genius in it is undeniable. I should say, for my part, that genius, the ruling divinity of poetry, had been too busy in it, and intelligence, the ruling divinity of prose, not busy enough. But can anyone, with the best models of style in his head, help feeling the note of provinciality there, the want of simplicity, the want of measure, the want of just the qualities

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that make prose classical? If he does not feel what I mean, let him place beside the passage of Taylor this passage from the Panegyric of St Paul, by Taylor's contemporary, Bossuet:—

‘Il ira, cet ignorant dans l’art de bien dire, avec cette locution rude, avec cette phrase qui sent l’étranger il ira en cette Grèce polie, la mère des philosophes et des orateurs; et malgré la résistance du monde, il y établira plus d’Eglises que Platon n’y a gagné de disciples par cette éloquence qu’on a crue divine.’

There we have prose without the note of provincality—classical prose, prose of the centre.

Or take Burke, our greatest English prose-writer, as I think; take expressions like this:—

‘Blindfold themselves, like bulls that shut their eyes when they push, they drive, by the point of their bayonets, their slaves, blindfolded, indeed, no worse than their lords, to take their fictions for currencies, and to swallow

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down paper pills by thirty-four millions sterling at a dose.'

Or this :—

'They used it' (the royal name) 'as a sort of navel-string, to nourish their unnatural offspring from the bowels of royalty itself. Now that the monster can purvey for its own subsistence, it will only carry the mark about it, as a token of its having torn the womb it came from.'

Or this :—

'Without one natural pang, he (Rousseau) 'casts away, as a sort of offal and excrement, the spawn of his disgusting amours, and sends his children to the hospital of foundlings.'

Or this :—

'I confess I never liked this continual talk of resistance and revolution, or the practice of making the extreme medicine of the constitution its daily bread. It renders the habit of society dangerously valetudinary; it is taking periodical doses of mercury sublimate, and

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swallowing down repeated provocatives of cantharides to our love of liberty.'

I say that is extravagant prose; prose too much suffered to indulge its caprices; prose at too great a distance from the centre of good taste; prose, in short, with the note of provinciality. People may reply, it is rich and imaginative; yes, that is just it, it is Asiatic prose, as the ancient critics would have said; prose somewhat barbarously rich and overloaded. But the true prose is Attic prose.

Well, but Addison's prose is Attic prose. Where, then, it may be asked, is the note of provinciality in Addison? I answer, in the commonplace of his ideas. This is a matter worth remarking. Addison claims to take leading rank as a moralist. To do that, you must have ideas of the first order on your subject—the best ideas, at any rate, attainable in your time—as well as be able to express them in a perfectly sound and sure style. Else you show

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your distance from the centre of ideas by your matter ; you are provincial by your matter, though you may not be provincial by your style. It is comparatively a small matter to express oneself well, if one will be content with not expressing much, with expressing only trite ideas ; the problem is to express new and profound ideas in a perfectly sound and classical style. He is the true classic, in every age, who does that. Now Addison has not, on his subject of morals, the force of ideas of the moralists of the first class—the classical moralists ; he has not the best ideas attainable in or about his time, and which were, so to speak, in the air then, to be seized by the finest spirits ; he is not to be compared for power, searchingness, or delicacy of thought to Pascal or La Bruyère or Vauvenargues ; he is rather on a level, in this respect, with a man like Marmontel. Therefore, I say, he has the note of provincality as a moralist ; he is pro-

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vincial by his matter, though not by his style.

To illustrate what I mean by an example. Addison, writing as a moralist on fixedness in religious faith, says :—

‘ Those who delight in reading books of controversy do very seldom arrive at a fixed and settled habit of faith. The doubt which was laid revives again, and shows itself in new difficulties ; and that generally for this reason,—because the mind, which is perpetually tossed in controversies and disputes, is apt to forget the reasons which had once set it at rest, and to be disquieted with any former perplexity when it appears in a new shape, or is started by a different hand.’

It may be said, that is classical English, perfect in lucidity, measure, and propriety. I make no objection ; but, in my turn, I say that the idea expressed is perfectly trite and barren, and that it is a note of provinciality in Addison, in a man whom a nation puts forward as one of its great moralists, to have no

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profounder and more striking idea to produce on this great subject. Compare, on the same subject, these words of a moralist really of the first order, really at the centre by his ideas,—Joubert :—

‘ L’expérience de beaucoup d’opinions donne à l’esprit beaucoup de flexibilité et l’affermit dans celles qu’il croit les meilleures.’

With what a flash of light that touches the subject! how it sets us thinking! what a genuine contribution to moral science it is!

In short, where there is no centre like an academy, if you have genius and powerful ideas, you are apt not to have the best style going; if you have precision of style and not genius, you are apt not to have the best ideas going.

The provincial spirit, again, exaggerates the value of its ideas for want of a high standard at hand by which to try them. Or rather, for want of such a standard, it gives one idea too much prominence at the expense of others;

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it orders its ideas amiss; it is hurried away by fancies; it likes and dislikes too passionately, too exclusively. Its admiration weeps hysterical tears, and its disapprobation foams at the mouth. So we get the eruptive and the aggressive manner in literature; the former prevails most in our criticism, the latter in our newspapers. For, not having the lucidity of a large and centrally placed intelligence, the provincial spirit has not its graciousness; it does not persuade, it makes war; it has not urbanity, the tone of the city, of the centre, the tone which always aims at a spiritual and intellectual effect, and not excluding the use of banter, never disjoins banter itself from politeness, from felicity. But the provincial tone is more violent, and seems to aim rather at an effect upon the blood and senses than upon the spirit and intellect; it loves hard-hitting rather than persuading. The newspaper, with its party spirit, its thorough-goingness, its re-

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solute avoidance of shades and distinctions, its short, highly-charged, heavy-shotted articles, its style so unlike that style *lenis minimèque pertinax*—easy and not too violently insisting,—which the ancients so much admired, is its true literature; the provincial spirit likes in the newspaper just what makes the newspaper such bad food for it,—just what made Goethe say, when he was pressed hard about the immorality of Byron's poems, that, after all, they were not so immoral as the newspapers. The French talk of the *brutalité des journaux anglais*. What strikes them comes from the necessary inherent tendencies of newspaper-writing not being checked in England by any centre of intelligent and urbane spirit, but rather stimulated by coming in contact with a provincial spirit. Even a newspaper like the *Saturday Review*, that old friend of all of us, a newspaper expressly aiming at an immunity from the common newspaper-spirit, aiming

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at being a sort of organ of reason,—and, by thus aiming, it merits great gratitude and has done great good,—even the *Saturday Review*, replying to some foreign criticism on our precautions against invasion, falls into a strain of this kind:—

‘To do this’ (to take these precautions) ‘seems to us eminently worthy of a great nation, and to talk of it as unworthy of a great nation, seems to us eminently worthy of a great fool.’

There is what the French mean when they talk of the *brutalité des journaux anglais*; there is a style certainly as far removed from urbanity as possible,—a style with what I call the note of provinciality. And the same note may not unfrequently be observed even in the ideas of this newspaper, full as it is of thought and cleverness: certain ideas allowed to become fixed ideas, to prevail too absolutely. I will not speak of the immediate present, but, to go a little while back, it had the critic who

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so disliked the Emperor of the French ; it had the critic who so disliked the subject of my present remarks—academies ; it had the critic who was so fond of the German element in our nation, and, indeed, everywhere ; who ground his teeth if one said Charlemagne instead of Charles the Great, and, in short, saw all things in Teutonism, as Malebranche saw all things in God. Certainly anyone may fairly find faults in the Emperor Napoleon or in academies, and merit in the German element ; but it is a note of the provincial spirit not to hold ideas of this kind a little more easily, to be so devoured by them, to suffer them to become crotchets.

In England there needs a miracle of genius like Shakspeare's to produce balance of mind, and a miracle of intellectual delicacy like Dr Newman's to produce urbanity of style. How prevalent all round us is the want of balance of mind and urbanity of style ! How

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much, doubtless, it is to be found in ourselves,—in each of us! but, as human nature is constituted, every one can see it clearest in his contemporaries. There, above all, we should consider it, because they and we are exposed to the same influences; and it is in the best of one's contemporaries that it is most worth considering, because one then most feels the harm it does, when one sees what they would be without it. Think of the difference between Mr Ruskin exercising his genius, and Mr Ruskin exercising his intelligence; consider the truth and beauty of this:—

‘Go out, in the spring-time, among the meadows that slope from the shores of the Swiss lakes to the roots of their lower mountains. There, mingled with the taller gentians and the white narcissus, the grass grows deep and free; and as you follow the winding mountain paths, beneath arching boughs all veiled and dim with blossom,—paths that for ever droop and rise over the

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green banks and mounds sweeping down in scented undulation, steep to the blue water studded here and there with new-mown heaps, filling all the air with fainter sweetness,—look up towards the higher hills, where the waves of everlasting green roll silently into their long inlets among the shadows of the pines. . . .’

There is what the genius, the feeling, the temperament in Mr Ruskin, the original and incommunicable part, has to do with; and how exquisite it is! All the critic could possibly suggest, in the way of objection, would be, perhaps, that Mr Ruskin is there trying to make prose do more than it can perfectly do; that what he is there attempting he will never, except in poetry, be able to accomplish to his own entire satisfaction: but he accomplishes so much that the critic may well hesitate to suggest even this. Place beside this charming passage another,—a passage about Shakspeare’s names,

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where the intelligence and judgment of Mr Ruskin, the acquired, trained, communicable part in him, are brought into play,—and see the difference:—

‘Of Shakspeare’s names I will afterwards speak at more length; they are curiously — often barbarously — mixed out of various traditions and languages. Three of the clearest in meaning have been already noticed. Desdemona—“δυσδαιμονία,” *miserable fortune*—is also plain enough. Othello is, I believe, “the careful”; all the calamity of the tragedy arising from the single flaw and error in his magnificently collected strength. Ophelia, “serviceableness,” the true, lost wife of Hamlet, is marked as having a Greek name by that of her brother, Laertes; and its signification is once exquisitely alluded to in that brother’s last word of her, where her gentle preciousness is opposed to the uselessness of the churlish clergy:—“A ministering angel shall my sister be, when thou liest howling.” Hamlet is,

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I believe, connected in some way with "homely," the entire event of the tragedy turning on betrayal of home duty. Hermione (ἑρμα), "pillar-like" (ἡ εἶδος ἔχει χρυσῆς Ἀφροδίτης); Titania (τιτάνη), "the queen"; Benedick and Beatrice, "blessed and blessing"; Valentine and Proteus, "enduring or strong" (*valens*), and "changeful." Iago and Iachimo have evidently the same root—probably the Spanish Iago, Jacob, "the supplanter."

Now, really, what a piece of extravagance all that is! I will not say that the meaning of Shakspeare's names (I put aside the question as to the correctness of Mr Ruskin's etymologies) has no effect at all, may be entirely lost sight of; but to give it that degree of prominence is to throw the reins to one's whim, to forget all moderation and proportion, to lose the balance of one's mind altogether. It is to show in one's criticism, to the highest excess, the note of provinciality.

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Again, there is Mr Palgrave, certainly endowed with a very fine critical tact: his 'Golden Treasury' abundantly proves it. The plan of arrangement which he devised for that work, the mode in which he followed his plan out, nay, one might even say, merely the juxtaposition, in pursuance of it, of two such pieces as those of Wordsworth and Shelley which form the 285th and 286th in his collection, show a delicacy of feeling in these matters which is quite indisputable and very rare. And his notes are full of remarks which show it too. All the more striking, conjoined with so much justness of perception, are certain freaks and violences in Mr Palgrave's criticism, mainly imputable, I think, to the critic's isolated position in this country, to his feeling himself too much left to take his own way, too much without any central authority representing high culture and sound judgment, by which he may be, on the one hand, confirmed as against the

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ignorant, on the other, held in respect when he himself is inclined to take liberties. I mean such things as this note on Milton's line,—

‘The great Emathian conqueror bade spare.’ . . .

‘When Thebes was destroyed, Alexander ordered the house of Pindar to be spared. He was as incapable of appreciating the poet as Louis XIV. of appreciating Racine; but even the narrow and barbarian mind of Alexander could understand the advantage of a showy act of homage to poetry.’ A note like that I call a freak or a violence; if this disparaging view of Alexander and Louis XIV., so unlike the current view, is wrong,—if the current view is, after all, the truer one of them,—the note is a freak. But, even if its disparaging view is right, the note is a violence; for, abandoning the true mode of intellectual action—persuasion, the instilment of conviction,—it simply astounds and irritates the hearer by

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contradicting without a word of proof or preparation, his fixed and familiar notions; and this is mere violence. In either case, the fitness, the measure, the centrality, which is the soul of all good criticism, is lost, and the note of provinciality shows itself.

Thus, in the famous 'Handbook' marks of a fine power of perception are everywhere discernible, but so, too, are marks of the want of sure balance, of the check and support afforded by knowing one speaks before good and severe judges. When Mr Palgrave dislikes a thing, he feels no pressure constraining him either to try his dislike closely or to express it moderately; he does not mince matters, he gives his dislike all its own way; both his judgment and his style would gain if he were under more restraint. 'The style which has filled London with the dead monotony of Gower or Harley Streets, or the pale commonplace of Belgravia, Tyburnia, and Kensington; which has

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pierced Paris and Madrid with the feeble frivolities of the Rue Rivoli and the Strada de Toledo.' He dislikes the architecture of the Rue Rivoli, and he puts it on a level with the architecture of Belgravia and Gower Street; he lumps them all together in one condemnation, he loses sight of the shade, the distinction, which is everything here; the distinction, namely, that the architecture of the Rue Rivoli expresses show, splendour, pleasure,—unworthy things, perhaps, to express alone and for their own sakes, but it expresses them; whereas the architecture of Gower Street and Belgravia merely expresses the impotence of the architect to express anything. Then, as to style: 'sculpture which stands in a contrast with Woolner hardly more shameful than diverting.' . . . 'passing from Davy or Faraday to the art of the mountebank or the science of the spirit-rapper.' . . . 'it is the old, old story with Marochetti, the frog trying

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to blow himself out to bull dimensions. He may puff and be puffed, but he will never do it.' We all remember that shower of amenities on poor M. Marochetti. Now, here Mr Palgrave himself enables us to form a contrast which lets us see just what the presence of an academy does for style; for he quotes a criticism by M. Gustave Planche on this very M. Marochetti. M. Gustave Planche was a critic of the very first order, a man of strong opinions, which he expressed with severity; he, too, condemns M. Marochetti's work, and Mr Palgrave calls him as a witness to back what he has himself said; certainly Mr Palgrave's translation will not exaggerate M. Planche's urbanity in dealing with M. Marochetti, but, even in this translation, see the difference in sobriety, in measure, between the critic writing in Paris and the critic writing in London :—

'These conditions are so elementary, that I am at a perfect loss to compre-

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hend how M. Marochetti has neglected them. There are soldiers here like the leaden playthings of the nursery: it is almost impossible to guess whether there is a body beneath the dress. We have here no question of style, not even of grammar; it is nothing beyond mere matter of the alphabet of art. To break these conditions is the same as to be ignorant of spelling.'

That is really more formidable criticism than Mr Palgrave's, and yet in how perfectly temperate a style! M. Planche's advantage is, that he feels himself to be speaking before competent judges, that there is a force of cultivated opinion for him to appeal to. Therefore, he must not be extravagant, and he need not storm; he must satisfy the reason and taste,—that is his business. Mr Palgrave, on the other hand, feels himself to be speaking before a promiscuous multitude, with the few good judges so scattered through it as to be powerless; therefore, he has no

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calm confidence and no self-control; he relies on the strength of his lungs; he knows that big words impose on the mob, and that, even if he is outrageous, most of his audience are apt to be a great deal more so.

Again, the first two volumes of Mr Kinglake's 'Invasion of the Crimea' were certainly among the most successful and renowned English books of our time. Their style was one of the most renowned things about them, and yet how conspicuous a fault in Mr Kinglake's style is this over-charge of which I have been speaking! Mr James Gordon Bennett, of the *New York Herald*, says, I believe, that the highest achievement of the human intellect is what he calls 'a good editorial.' This is not quite so; but, if it were so, on what a height would these two volumes by Mr Kinglake stand! I have already spoken of the Attic and the Asiatic styles; besides these, there is the Corinthian style. That is the style for 'a good editorial,'

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and Mr Kinglake has really reached perfection in it. It has not the warm glow, blithe movement, and soft pliancy of life, as the Attic style has: it has not the over-heavy richness and encumbered gait of the Asiatic style; it has glitter without warmth, rapidity without ease, effectiveness without charm. Its characteristic is, that it has no soul; all it exists for, is to get its ends, to make its points, to damage its adversaries, to be admired, to triumph. A style so bent on effect at the expense of soul, simplicity, and delicacy; a style so little studious of the charm of the great models; so far from classic truth and grace, must surely be said to have the note of provinciality. Yet Mr Kinglake's talent is a really eminent one, and so in harmony with our intellectual habits and tendencies, that, to the great bulk of English people, the faults of his style seem its merits; all the more needful that criticism should not be dazzled by them.

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We must not compare a man of Mr Kinglake's literary talent with French writers like M. de Bazancourt. We must compare him with M. Thiers. And what a superiority in style has M. Thiers from being formed in a good school, with severe traditions, wholesome restraining influences! Even in this age of Mr James Gordon Bennett, his style has nothing Corinthian about it, its lightness and brightness make it almost Attic. It is not quite Attic, however; it has not the infallible sureness of Attic taste. Sometimes his head gets a little hot with the fumes of patriotism, and then he crosses the line, he loses perfect measure, he declaims, he raises a momentary smile. France condemned 'à être l'effroi du monde *dont elle pourrait être l'amour*,'—Cæsar, whose exquisite simplicity M. Thiers so much admires, would not have written like that. There is, if I may be allowed to say so, the slightest possible touch of fatuity in such language,—of that failure in

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good sense which comes from too warm a self-satisfaction. But compare this language with Mr Kinglake's Marshal St Arnaud—'dismissed from the presence' of Lord Raglan or Lord Stratford, 'cowed and pressed down' under their 'stern reproofs,' or under 'the majesty of the great Elchi's Canning brow and tight, merciless lips!' The failure in good sense and good taste there reaches far beyond what the French mean by fatuity; they would call it by another word, a word expressing blank defect of intelligence, a word for which we have no exact equivalent in English,—*bête*. It is the difference between a venial, momentary, good-tempered excess, in a man of the world, of an amiable and social weakness,—vanity; and a serious, settled, fierce, narrow, provincial misconception of the whole relative value of one's own things and the things of others. So baneful to the style of even the cleverest man may be the total want of checks.

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In all I have said, I do not pretend that the examples given prove my rule as to the influence of academies; they only illustrate it. Examples in plenty might very likely be found to set against them; the truth of the rule depends, no doubt, on whether the balance of all the examples is in its favour or not; but actually to strike this balance is always out of the question. Here, as everywhere else, the rule, the idea, if true, commends itself to the judicious, and then the examples make it clearer still to them. This is the real use of examples, and this alone is the purpose which I have meant mine to serve. There is also another side to the whole question,—as to the limiting and prejudicial operation which academies may have; but this side of the question it rather behoves the French, not us, to study.

The reader will ask for some practical conclusion about the establishment of an Academy in this country, and

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perhaps I shall hardly give him the one he expects. But nations have their own modes of acting, and these modes are not easily changed; they are even consecrated, when great things have been done in them. When a literature has produced Shakspeare and Milton, when it has even produced Barrow and Burke, it cannot well abandon its traditions; it can hardly begin, at this late time of day, with an institution like the French Academy. I think academies with a limited, special, scientific scope, in the various lines of intellectual work, —academies like that of Berlin, for instance,—we with time may, and probably shall, establish. And no doubt they will do good; no doubt the presence of such influential centres of correct information will tend to raise the standard amongst us for what I have called the journeyman-work of literature, and to free us from the scandal of such biographical dictionaries as Chalmers's, or such translations as a recent one of

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Spinoza, or perhaps, such philological freaks as Mr Forster's about the one primeval language. But an academy quite like the French Academy, a sovereign organ of the highest literary opinion, a recognised authority in matters of intellectual tone and taste, we shall hardly have, and perhaps we ought not to wish to have it. But then every one amongst us with any turn for literature will do well to remember to what shortcomings and excesses, which such an academy tends to correct, we are liable; and the more liable, of course, for not having it. He will do well constantly to try himself in respect of these, steadily to widen his culture, severely to check in himself the provincial spirit; and he will do this the better the more he keeps in mind that all mere glorification by ourselves of ourselves or our literature, in the strain of what, at the beginning of these remarks, I quoted from Lord Macaulay, is both vulgar, and, besides being vulgar, retarding.

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I WILL not presume to say that I now know the French language well ; but at a time when I knew it even less well than at present,—some fifteen years ago,—I remember pestering those about me with this sentence, the rhythm of which had lodged itself in my head, and which, with the strangest pronunciation possible, I kept perpetually declaiming: ‘ *Les dieux jaloux ont enfoui quelque part les témoignages de la descendance des choses ; mais au bord de quel Océan ont-ils roulé la pierre qui les couvre, ô Macarée !* ’

These words come from a short composition called the ‘Centaur,’ of which the author, Georges-Maurice de Guérin, died in the year 1839, at the age of twenty-eight, without having published anything. In 1840, Madame Sand

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brought out the 'Centaur' in the '*Revue des Deux Mondes*, with a short notice of its author, and a few extracts from his letters. A year or two afterwards she reprinted these at the end of a volume of her novels; and there it was that I fell in with them. I was so much struck with the 'Centaur' that I waited anxiously to hear something more of its author, and of what he had left; but it was not till the other day—twenty years after the first publication of the 'Centaur' in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, that my anxiety was satisfied. At the end of 1860 appeared two volumes with the title 'Maurice de Guérin, Reliquiæ,' containing the 'Centaur,' several poems of Guérin, his journals, and a number of his letters, collected and edited by a devoted friend, M. Trebutien, and preceded by a notice of Guérin by the first of living critics, M. Sainte-Beuve.

The grand power of poetry is its interpretative power; by which I mean,

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not a power of drawing out in black and white an explanation of the mystery of the universe, but the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them, and of our relations with them. When this sense is awakened in us, as to objects without us, we feel ourselves to be in contact with the essential nature of those objects, to be no longer bewildered and oppressed by them, but to have their secret, and to be in harmony with them; and this feeling calms and satisfies us as no other can. Poetry, indeed, interprets in another way besides this; but one of its two ways of interpreting, of exercising its highest power, is by awakening this sense in us. I will not now inquire whether this sense is illusive, whether it can be proved not to be elusive, whether it does absolutely make us possess the real nature of things; all I say is, that poetry can awaken it in us, and that to awaken it is one of the highest

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powers of poetry. The interpretations of science do not give us this intimate sense of objects as the interpretations of poetry give it; they appeal to a limited faculty, and not to the whole man. It is not Linnæus or Cavendish or Cuvier who gives us the true sense of animals, or water, or plants, who seizes their secret for us, who makes us participate in their life; it is Shakspeare, with his

‘daffodils

That come before the swallow dares,
and take

The winds of March with beauty’;
it is Wordsworth, with his

‘voice . . . heard

In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides’;

it is Keats, with his

‘moving waters at their priest-
like task

Of cold ablution round Earth’s human
shores’;

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it is Chateaubriand, with his, '*cîme indéterminée des forêts*'; it is Senancour, with his mountain birch-tree: '*Cette écorce blanche, lisse et crevassée; cette tige agreste; ces branches qui s'inclinent vers la terre; la mobilité des feuilles, et tout cet abandon, simplicité de la nature, attitude des déserts.*'

Eminent manifestations of this magical power of poetry are very rare and very precious: the compositions of Guérin manifest it, I think, in singular eminence. Not his poems, strictly so called,—his verse,—so much as his prose; his poems in general take for their vehicle that favourite metre of French poetry, the Alexandrine; and, in my judgment, I confess they have thus, as compared with his prose, a great disadvantage to start with. In prose, the character of the vehicle for the composer's thoughts is not determined beforehand; every composer has to make his own vehicle; and who has ever done this more admirably than the

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great prose-writers of France,—Pascal, Bossuet, Fénelon, Voltaire? But in verse the composer has (with comparatively narrow liberty of modification) to accept his vehicle ready-made; it is therefore of vital importance to him that he should find at his disposal a vehicle adequate to convey the highest matters of poetry. We may even get a decisive test of the poetical power of a language and nation by ascertaining how far the principal poetical vehicle which they have employed, how far (in plainer words) the established national metre for high poetry, is adequate or inadequate. It seems to me that the established metre of this kind in France,—the Alexandrine,—is inadequate; that as a vehicle for high poetry it is greatly inferior to the hexameter or to the iambics of Greece (for example), or to the blank verse of England. Therefore the man of genius who uses it is at a disadvantage as compared with the man of genius who has for conveying his

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thoughts a more adequate vehicle, metrical or not. Racine is at a disadvantage as compared with Sophocles or Shakspeare, and he is likewise at a disadvantage as compared with Bossuet.

The same may be said of our own poets of the eighteenth century, a century which gave them as the main vehicle for their high poetry a metre inadequate (as much as the French Alexandrine, and nearly in the same way) for this poetry,—the ten-syllable couplet. It is worth remarking, that the English poet of the eighteenth century whose compositions wear best and give one the most entire satisfaction,—Gray,—hardly uses that couplet at all: this abstinence, however, limits Gray's productions to a few short compositions, and (exquisite as these are) he is a poetical nature repressed and without free issue. For English poetical production on a great scale, for an English poet deploying all the forces of his genius, the

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ten-syllable couplet was, in the eighteenth century, the established, one may almost say the inevitable, channel. Now this couplet, admirable (as Chaucer uses it) for story-telling not of the epic pitch, and often admirable for a few lines even in poetry of a very high pitch, is for continuous use in poetry of this latter kind inadequate. Pope, in his 'Essay on Man,' is thus at a disadvantage compared with Lucretius in his poem on Nature: Lucretius has an adequate vehicle, Pope has not. Nay, though Pope's genius for didactic poetry was not less than that of Horace, while his satirical power was certainly greater, still one's taste receives, I cannot but think, a certain satisfaction when one reads the Epistles and Satires of Horace, which it fails to receive when one reads the Satires and Epistles of Pope. Of such avail is the superior adequacy of the vehicle used to compensate even an inferiority of genius in the user! In the same way Pope is

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at a disadvantage as compared with Addison. The best of Addison's composition (the 'Coverley Papers' in the *Spectator*, for instance) wears better than the best of Pope's, because Addison has in his prose an intrinsically better vehicle for his genius than Pope in his couplet. But Bacon has no such advantage over Shakspeare; nor has Milton, writing prose (for no contemporary English prose-writer must be matched with Milton except Milton himself), any such advantage over Milton writing verse: indeed, the advantage here is all the other way.

It is in the prose remains of Guérin,—his journals, his letters, and the striking composition which I have already mentioned, the 'Centaur,'—that his extraordinary gift manifests itself. He has a truly interpretative faculty; the most profound and delicate sense of the life of Nature, and the most exquisite felicity in finding expressions to render that sense. To all who love poetry, Guérin

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deserves to be something more than a name; and I shall try, in spite of the impossibility of doing justice to such a master of expression by translations, to make English readers see for themselves how gifted an organisation his was, and how few artists have received from Nature a more magical faculty of interpreting her.

In the winter of the year 1832 there was collected in Brittany, around the well-known Abbé Lamennais, a singular gathering. At a lonely place, La Chênaie, he had founded a religious retreat, to which disciples, attracted by his powers or by his reputation, repaired. Some came with the intention of preparing themselves for the ecclesiastical profession; others merely to profit by the society and discourse of so distinguished a master. Among the inmates were men whose names have since become known to all Europe,—Lacordaire and M. de Montalembert; there were others, who have acquired

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a reputation, not European, indeed, but considerable, — the Abbé Gerbet, the Abbé Rohrbacher; others, who have never quitted the shade of private life. The winter of 1832 was a period of crisis in the religious world of France: Lamennais's rupture with Rome, the condemnation of his opinions by the Pope, and his revolt against that condemnation, were imminent. Some of his followers, like Lacordaire, had already resolved not to cross the Rubicon with their leader, not to go into rebellion against Rome; they were preparing to separate from him. The society of La Chênaie was soon to dissolve; but, such as it is shown to us for a moment, with its voluntary character, its simple and severe life in common, its mixture of lay and clerical members, the genius of its chiefs, the sincerity of its disciples, — above all, its paramount fervent interest in matters of spiritual and religious concernment, — it offers a most instructive spectacle. It is not the spectacle we

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most of us think to find in France, the France we have imagined from common English notions, from the streets of Paris, from novels; it shows us how, wherever there is greatness like that of France, there are, as its foundation, treasures of fervour, pure-mindedness, and spirituality somewhere, whether we know of them or not;—a store of that which Goethe calls *Halt*;—since greatness can never be founded upon frivolity and corruption.

On the evening of the 18th of December in this year 1832, M. de Lamennais was talking to those assembled in the sitting-room of La Chênaie of his recent journey to Italy. He talked with all his usual animation; ‘but,’ writes one of his hearers, a Breton gentleman, M. de Marzan, ‘I soon became inattentive and absent, being struck with the reserved attitude of a young stranger some twenty-two years old, pale in face, his black hair already thin over his temples, with a southern eye, in which bright-

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ness and melancholy were mingled. He kept himself somewhat aloof, seeming to avoid notice rather than to court it. All the old faces of friends which I found about me at this my re-entry into the circle of La Chênaie failed to occupy me so much as the sight of this stranger, looking on, listening, observing, and saying nothing.'

The unknown was Maurice de Guérin. Of a noble but poor family, having lost his mother at six years old, he had been brought up by his father, a man saddened by his wife's death, and austere religious, at the château of Le Cayla, in Languedoc. His childhood was not gay; he had not the society of other boys; and solitude, the sight of his father's gloom, and the habit of accompanying the curé of the parish on his rounds among the sick and dying, made him prematurely grave and familiar with sorrow. He went to school first at Toulouse, then at the Collège Stanislas at Paris, with a temperament almost as

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unfit as Shelley's for common school life. His youth was ardent, sensitive, agitated, and unhappy. In 1832 he procured admission to La Chênaie to brace his spirit by the teaching of Lamennais, and to decide whether his religious feelings would determine themselves into a distinct religious vocation. Strong and deep religious feelings he had, implanted in him by nature, developed in him by the circumstances of his childhood; but he had also (and here is the key to his character) that temperament which opposes itself to the fixedness of a religious vocation, or to any vocation of which fixedness is an essential attribute; a temperament mobile, inconstant, eager, thirsting for new impressions, abhorring rules, aspiring to a 'renovation without end'; a temperament common enough among artists, but with which few artists, who have it to the same degree as Guérin, unite a seriousness and a sad intensity like his. After leaving school, and before go-

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ing to La Chênaie, he had been at home at Le Cayla with his sister Eugénie (a wonderfully gifted person, whose genius so competent a judge as M. Sainte-Beuve is inclined to pronounce even superior to her brother's) and his sister Eugénie's friends. With one of these friends he had fallen in love,—a slight and transient fancy, but which had already called his poetical powers into exercise ; and his poems and fragments, in a certain green note-book ('le Cahier Vert') which he long continued to make the depository of his thoughts, and which became famous among his friends, he brought with him to La Chênaie. There he found among the younger members of the Society several who, like himself, had a secret passion for poetry and literature ; with these he became intimate, and in his letters and journal we find him occupied, now with a literary commerce established with these friends, now with the fortunes, fast coming to a crisis, of the

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Society, and now with that for the sake of which he came to La Chênaie,—his religious progress and the state of his soul.

On Christmas-day, 1832, having been then three weeks at La Chênaie, he writes thus of it to a friend of his family, M. de Bayne:—

‘La Chênaie is a sort of oasis in the midst of the steppes of Brittany. In front of the château stretches a very large garden cut in two by a terrace with a lime avenue, at the end of which is a tiny chapel. I am extremely fond of this little oratory, where one breathes a twofold peace,—the peace of solitude and the peace of the Lord. When spring comes we shall walk to prayers between two borders of flowers. On the east side, and only a few yards from the château, sleeps a small mere between two woods, where the birds in warm weather sing all day long; and then,—right, left, on all sides,—woods, woods, everywhere woods. It looks desolate

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just now that all is bare and the woods are rust-colour, and under this Brittany sky, which is always clouded and so low that it seems as if it were going to fall on your head; but as soon as spring comes the sky raises itself up, the woods come to life again, and everything will be full of charm.'

Of what La Chênaie will be when spring comes he has a foretaste on the 3rd of March.

'To-day' (he writes in his journal) 'has enchanted me. For the first time for a long while the sun has shown himself in all his beauty. He has made the buds of the leaves and flowers swell, and he has waked up in me a thousand happy thoughts. The clouds assume more and more their light and graceful shapes, and are sketching, over the blue sky, the most charming fancies. The woods have not yet got their leaves, but they are taking an indescribable air of life and gaiety, which gives them quite a new physiognomy. Everything

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is getting ready for the great festival of Nature.'

Storm and snow adjourn this festival a little longer. On the 11th of March he writes :—

'It has snowed all night. I have been to look at our primroses; each of them has its small load of snow, and was bowing its head under its burden. These pretty flowers, with their rich yellow colour, had a charming effect under their white hoods. I saw whole tufts of them roofed over by a single block of snow; all these laughing flowers thus shrouded and leaning one upon another, made one think of a group of young girls surprised by a shower, and sheltering under a white apron.'

The burst of spring comes at last, though late. On the 5th of April we find Guérin 'sitting in the sun to penetrate himself to the very marrow with the divine spring.' On the 3rd of May, 'one can actually see the progress of the green; it has made a start from the

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garden to the shrubberies, it is getting the upper hand all along the mere; it leaps, one may say, from tree to tree, from thicket to thicket, in the fields and on the hill-sides; and I can see it already arrived at the forest edge and beginning to spread itself over the broad back of the forest. Soon it will have overrun everything as far as the eye can reach, and all those wide spaces between here and the horizon will be moving and sounding like one vast sea, a sea of emerald.'

Finally, on the 16th of May, he writes to M. de Bayne that 'the gloomy and bad days, — bad because they bring temptation by their gloom,—are, thanks to God and the spring, over; and I see approaching a long file of shining and happy days, to do me all the good in the world. This Brittany of ours,' he continues, 'gives one the idea of the grayest and most wrinkled old woman possible suddenly changed back by the touch of a fairy's wand into a girl of

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twenty, and one of the loveliest in the world; the fine weather has so decked and beautified the dear old country.' He felt, however, the cloudiness and cold of the 'dear old country' with all the sensitiveness of a child of the South. 'What a difference,' he cries, 'between the sky of Brittany, even on the finest day, and the sky of our South! Here the summer has, even on its highdays and holidays, something mournful, overcast, and stinted about it. It is like a miser who is making a show; there is a niggardliness in his magnificence. Give me our Languedoc sky, so bountiful of light, so blue, so largely vaulted!' And somewhat later, complaining of the short and dim sunlight of a February day in Paris, 'What a sunshine,' he exclaims, 'to gladden eyes accustomed to all the wealth of light of the South!—*aux larges et libérales effusions de lumière du ciel du Midi.*'

In the long winter of La Chênaie his great resource was literature. One has

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often heard that an educated Frenchman's reading seldom goes much beyond French and Latin, and that he makes the authors in these two languages his sole literary standard. This may or may not be true of Frenchmen in general, but there can be no question as to the width of the reading of Guérin and his friends, and as to the range of their literary sympathies. One of the circle, Hippolyte la Morvonnais,—a poet who published a volume of verse, and died in the prime of life,—had a passionate admiration for Wordsworth, and had even, it is said, made a pilgrimage to Rydal Mount to visit him; and in Guérin's own reading I find, besides the French names of Bernardin de St Pierre, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Victor Hugo, the names of Homer, Dante, Shakspeare, Milton, and Goethe; and he quotes both from Greek and from English authors in the original. His literary tact is beautifully fine and true. 'Every poet,' he writes to his

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sister, 'has his own art of poetry written on the ground of his own soul; there is no other. Be constantly observing Nature in her smallest details, and then write as the current of your thoughts guides you;—that is all.' But with all this freedom from the bondage of forms and rules, Guérin marks with perfect precision the faults of the free French literature of his time,—the *littérature facile*,—and judges the romantic school and its prospects like a master: 'that youthful literature which has put forth all its blossom prematurely, and has left itself a helpless prey to the returning frost, stimulated as it has been by the burning sun of our century, by this atmosphere charged with a perilous heat, which has over-hastened every sort of development, and will most likely reduce to a handful of grains the harvest of our age.' And the popular authors,—those 'whose name appears once and disappears for ever, whose books, unwelcome to all serious people,

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welcome to the rest of the world, to novelty-hunters and novel-readers, fill with vanity these vain souls, and then, falling from hands heavy with the languor of satiety, drop for ever into the gulf of oblivion'; and those, more noteworthy, 'the writers of books celebrated, and, as works of art, deserving celebrity, but which have in them not one grain of that hidden manna, not one of those sweet and wholesome thoughts which nourish the human soul and refresh it when it is weary,'—these he treats with such severity that he may in some sense be described, as he describes himself, as 'invoking with his whole heart a classical restoration.' He is best described, however, not as a partisan of any school, but as an ardent seeker for that mode of expression which is the most natural, happy, and true. He writes to his sister Eugénie:—

'I want you to reform your system of composition; it is too loose, too

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vague, too Lamartinian. Your verse is too sing-song; it does not talk enough. Form for yourself a style of your own, which shall be your real expression. Study the French language by attentive reading, making it your care to remark constructions, turns of expression, delicacies of style, but without ever adopting the manner of any master. In the works of these masters we must learn our language, but we must use it each in our own fashion.'

It was not, however, to perfect his literary judgment that Guérin came to La Chênaie. The religious feeling, which was as much a part of his essence as the passion for Nature and the literary instinct, shows itself at moments jealous of these its rivals, and alarmed at their predominance. Like all powerful feelings, it wants to exclude every other feeling and to be absolute. One Friday in April, after he has been delighting himself with the shapes of the clouds and the progress of the spring,

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he suddenly bethinks himself that the day is Good Friday, and exclaims in his diary:—

‘My God, what is my soul about that it can thus go running after such fugitive delights on Good Friday, on this day all filled with thy death and our redemption? There is in me I know not what damnable spirit, that awakens in me strong discontents, and is for ever prompting me to rebel against the holy exercises and the devout collectedness of soul which are the meet preparation for these great solemnities of our faith. Oh how well can I trace here the old leaven, from which I have not yet perfectly cleared my soul!’

And again, in a letter to M. de Marzan: ‘Of what, my God, are we made,’ he cries, ‘that a little verdure and a few trees should be enough to rob us of our tranquillity and to distract us from thy love?’ And writing, three days after Easter Sunday, in his journal, he records the reception at La Chênaie

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of a fervent neophyte, in words which seem to convey a covert blame of his own want of fervency:—

‘Three days have passed over our heads since the great festival. One anniversary the less for us yet to spend of the death and resurrection of our Saviour! Every year thus bears away with it its solemn festivals; when will the everlasting festival be here? I have been witness of a most touching sight; François has brought us one of his friends whom he has gained to the faith. This neophyte joined us in our exercises during the Holy week, and on Easter day he received the communion with us. François was in raptures. It is a truly good work which he has thus done. François is quite young, hardly twenty years old; M. de la M. is thirty and is married. There is something most touching and beautifully simple in M. de la M. letting himself thus be brought to God by quite a young man; and to see friendship, on Fran-

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çois's side, thus doing the work of an Apostle, is not less beautiful and touching.'

Admiration for Lamennais worked in the same direction with this feeling. Lamennais never appreciated Guérin; his combative, rigid, despotic nature, of which the characteristic was energy, had no affinity with Guérin's elusive, undulating, impalpable nature, of which the characteristic was delicacy. He set little store by his new disciple, and could hardly bring himself to understand what others found so remarkable in him, his own genuine feeling towards him being one of indulgent compassion. But the intuition of Guérin, more discerning than the logic of his master, instinctively felt what there was commanding and tragic in Lamennais's character, different as this was from his own; and some of his notes are among the most interesting records of Lamennais which remain.

"Do you know what it is," M. Féli

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said to us on the evening of the day before yesterday, "which makes man the most suffering of all creatures? It is that he has one foot in the finite and the other in the infinite, and that he is torn asunder, not by four horses, as in the horrible old times, but between two worlds." Again he said to us as we heard the clock strike: "If that clock knew that it was to be destroyed the next instant, it would still keep striking its hour until that instant arrived. My children, be as the clock; whatever may be going to happen to you, strike always your hour."

Another time Guérin writes:

'To-day M. Féli startled us. He was sitting behind the chapel, under the two Scotch firs; he took his stick and marked out a grave on the turf, and said to Elie, "It is there I wish to be buried, but no tombstone! only a simple hillock of grass. Oh, how well I shall be there!" Elie thought he had a presentiment that his end was near. This

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is not the first time he has been visited by such a presentiment; when he was setting out for Rome, he said to those here: "I do not expect ever to come back to you; you must do the good which I have failed to do." He is impatient for death.'

Overpowered by the ascendancy of Lamennais, Guérin, in spite of his hesitations, in spite of his confession to himself that, 'after a three weeks' close scrutiny of his soul, in the hope of finding the pearl of a religious vocation hidden in some corner of it,' he had failed to find what he sought, took, at the end of August 1833, a decisive step. He joined the religious order which Lamennais had founded. But at this very moment the deepening displeasure of Rome with Lamennais determined the Bishop of Rennes to break up, in so far as it was a religious congregation, the Society of La Chênaie, to transfer the novices to Ploërmel, and to place them under other superintend-

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ence. In September, Lamennais, 'who had not yet ceased,' writes M. de Marzan, a fervent Catholic, 'to be a Christian and a priest, took leave of his beloved colony of La Chênaie, with the anguish of a general who disbands his army down to the last recruit, and withdraws annihilated from the field of battle.' Guérin went to Ploërmel. But here, in the seclusion of a real religious house, he instantly perceived how alien to a spirit like his,—a spirit which, as he himself says somewhere, 'had need of the open air, wanted to see the sun and the flowers,'—was the constraint and monotony of a monastic life, when Lamennais's genius was no longer present to enliven this life for him. On the 7th of October he renounced the novitiate, believing himself a partisan of Lamennais in his quarrel with Rome, reproaching the life he had left with demanding passive obedience instead of trying 'to put in practice the admirable alliance of order with liberty, and

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of variety with unity,' and declaring that, for his part, he preferred taking the chances of a life of adventure to submitting himself to be '*garotté par un règlement*,—tied hand and foot by a set of rules.' In real truth, a life of adventure, or rather a life free to wander at its own will, was that to which his nature irresistibly impelled him.

For a career of adventure, the inevitable field was Paris. But before this career began, there came a stage, the smoothest, perhaps, and the most happy in the short life of Guérin. M. la Morvonnais, one of his La Chênaie friends,—some years older than Guérin, and married to a wife of singular sweetness and charm,—had a house by the seaside at the mouth of one of the beautiful rivers of Brittany, the Arguenon. He asked Guérin, when he left Ploërmel, to come and stay with him at this place, called Le Val de l'Arguenon, and Guérin spent the winter of 1833-4 there. I grudge every word about Le Val and

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its inmates which is not Guérin's own, so charming is the picture he draws of them, so truly does his talent find itself in its best vein as he draws it.

‘How full of goodness’ (he writes in his journal of the 7th of December) ‘is Providence to me! For fear the sudden passage from the mild and temperate air of a religious life to the torrid clime of the world should be too trying for my soul, it has conducted me, after I have left my sacred shelter, to a house planted on the frontier between the two regions, where, without being in solitude, one is not yet in the world; a house whose windows look on the one side towards the plain where the tumult of men is rocking, on the other towards the wilderness where the servants of God are chanting. I intend to write down the record of my sojourn here, for the days here spent are full of happiness, and I know that in the time to come I shall often turn back to the story of these past felicities. A man,

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pious, and a poet; a woman, whose spirit is in such perfect sympathy with his that you would say they had but one being between them; a child, called Marie like her mother, and who sends, like a star, the first rays of her love and thought through the white cloud of infancy; a simple life in an old-fashioned house; the ocean, which comes morning and evening to bring us its harmonies; and lastly, a wanderer who descends from Carmel and is going on to Babylon, and who has laid down at this threshold his staff and his sandals, to take his seat at the hospitable table;—here is matter to make a biblical poem of, if I could only describe things as I can feel them!’

Every line written by Guérin during this stay at Le Val is worth quoting, but I have only room for one extract more:—

‘Never’ (he writes, a fortnight later, on the 20th of December), ‘never have I tasted so inwardly and deeply the

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happiness of home-life. All the little details of this life, which in their succession make up the day, are to me so many stages of a continuous charm carried from one end of the day to the other. The morning greeting, which in some sort renews the pleasure of the first arrival, for the words with which one meets are almost the same, and the separation at night, through the hours of darkness and uncertainty, does not ill represent longer separations; then breakfast, during which you have the fresh enjoyment of having met together again; the stroll afterwards, when we go out and bid Nature good-morning; the return and setting to work in an old panelled chamber looking out on the sea, inaccessible to all the stir of the house, a perfect sanctuary of labour; dinner, to which we are called, not by a bell, which reminds one too much of school or a great house, but by a pleasant voice; the gaiety, the merriment, the talk flitting from one subject to

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another and never dropping so long as the meal lasts; the crackling fire of dry branches to which we draw our chairs directly afterwards, the kind words that are spoken round the warm flame which sings while we talk; and then, if it is fine, the walk by the seaside, when the sea has for its visitors a mother with her child in her arms, this child's father and a stranger, each of these two last with a stick in his hand; the rosy lips of the little girl, which keep talking at the same time with the waves, —now and then tears shed by her and cries of childish fright at the edge of the sea; our thoughts, the father's and mine, as we stand and look at the mother and child smiling at one another, or at the child in tears and the mother trying to comfort it by her caresses and exhortations; the Ocean, going on all the while rolling up his waves and noises; the dead boughs which we go and cut, here and there, out of the copse-wood, to make a quick

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and bright fire when we get home,—this little taste of the woodman's calling which brings us closer to Nature and makes us think of M. Féli's eager fondness for the same work; the hours of study and poetical flow which carry us to supper-time; this meal, which summons us by the same gentle voice as its predecessor, and which is passed amid the same joys, only less loud, because evening sobers everything, tones everything down; then our evening, ushered in by the blaze of a cheerful fire, and which with its alternations of reading and talking brings us at last to bedtime:—to all the charms of a day so spent add the dreams which follow it, and your imagination will still fall far short of these home-joys in their delightful reality.'

I said the foregoing should be my last extract, but who could resist this picture of a January evening on the coast of Brittany?—

'All the sky is covered over with

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gray clouds just silvered at the edges. The sun, who departed a few minutes ago, has left behind him enough light to temper for awhile the black shadows, and to soften down, as it were, the approach of night. The winds are hushed, and the tranquil ocean sends up to me, when I go out on the doorstep to listen, only a melodious murmur, which dies away in the soul like a beautiful wave on the beach. The birds, the first to obey the nocturnal influence, make their way towards the woods, and you hear the rustle of their wings in the clouds. The copses which cover the whole hill-side of Le Val, which all the daytime are alive with the chirp of the wren, the laughing whistle of the woodpecker, and the different notes of a multitude of birds, have no longer any sound in their paths and thickets, unless it be the prolonged high call of the blackbirds at play with one another and chasing one another, after all the other birds have their heads safe under

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their wings. The noise of man, always the last to be silent, dies gradually out over the face of the fields. The general murmur fades away, and one hears hardly a sound except what comes from the villages and hamlets, in which, up till far into the night, there are cries of children and barking of dogs. Silence wraps me round; everything seeks repose except this pen of mine, which perhaps disturbs the rest of some living atom asleep in a crease of my notebook, for it makes its light scratching as it puts down these idle thoughts. Let it stop, then! for all I write, have written, or shall write, will never be worth setting against the sleep of an atom.'

On the 1st of February we find him in a lodging at Paris. 'I enter the world' (such are the last words written in his journal at Le Val) 'with a secret horror.' His outward history for the next five years is soon told. He found himself in Paris, poor, fastidious, and with health which already, no doubt,

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felt the obscure presence of the malady of which he died—consumption. One of his Brittany acquaintances introduced him to editors, tried to engage him in the periodical literature of Paris; and so unmistakable was Guérin's talent that even his first essays were immediately accepted. But Guérin's genius was of a kind which unfitted him to get his bread in this manner. At first he was pleased with the notion of living by his pen; '*je n'ai qu'à écrire,*' he says to his sister,—'I have only got to write.' But to a nature like his, endued with the passion for perfection, the necessity to produce, to produce constantly, to produce whether in the vein or out of the vein, to produce something good or bad or middling, as it may happen, but at all events something,—is the most intolerable of tortures. To escape from it he betook himself to that common but most perfidious refuge of men of letters, that refuge to which Goldsmith and poor Hartley Coleridge had be-

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taken themselves before him, — the profession of teaching. In September 1834 he procured an engagement at the Collège Stanislas, where he had himself been educated. It was vacation-time, and all he had to do was to teach a small class composed of boys who did not go home for the holidays,—in his own words, ‘scholars left like sick sheep in the fold, while the rest of the flock are frisking in the fields.’ After the vacation he was kept on at the college as a supernumerary. ‘The master of the fifth class has asked for a month’s leave of absence; I am taking his place, and by this work I get one hundred francs (£4). I have been looking about for pupils to give private lessons to, and I have found three or four. Schoolwork and private lessons together fill my day from half-past seven in the morning till half-past nine at night. The college dinner serves me for breakfast, and I go and dine in the evening at twenty-four *sous*, as a young

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man beginning life should.' To better his position in the hierarchy of public teachers it was necessary that he should take the degree of *agrégé ès-lettres*, corresponding to our degree of Master of Arts; and to his heavy work in teaching, there was thus added that of preparing for a severe examination. The drudgery of this life was very irksome to him, although less insupportable than the drudgery of the profession of letters; inasmuch as to a sensitive man like Guérin, to silence his genius is more tolerable than to hackney it. Still the yoke wore him deeply, and he had moments of bitter revolt; he continued, however, to bear it with resolution, and on the whole with patience, for four years. On the 15th of November 1838 he married a young Creole lady of some fortune, Mademoiselle Caroline de Gervain, 'whom,' to use his own words, 'Destiny, who loves these surprises, has wafted from the farthest Indies into my arms.' The marriage

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was happy, and it ensured to Guérin liberty and leisure ; but now 'the blind Fury with the ahhorred shears' was hard at hand. Consumption declared itself in him : 'I pass my life,' he writes, with his old playfulness and calm, to his sister on the 8th of April 1839, 'within my bed-curtains, and wait patiently enough, thanks to Caro's goodness, books, and dreams, for the recovery which the sunshine is to bring with it.' In search of this sunshine he was taken to his native country, Languedoc, but in vain. He died at Le Cayla on the 19th of July 1839.

The vicissitudes of his inward life during these five years were more considerable. His opinions and tastes underwent great, or what seem to be great, changes. He came to Paris the ardent partisan of Lamennais : even in April 1834, after Rome had finally condemned Lamennais,—'To-night there will go forth from Paris,' he writes, 'with his face set to the west, a man whose every step I

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would fain follow, and who returns to the desert for which I sigh. M. Féli departs this evening for La Chênaie.' But in October 1835, — 'I assure you,' he writes to his sister, 'I am at last weaned from M. de Lamennais; one does not remain a babe and suckling for ever; I am perfectly freed from his influence.' There was a greater change than this. In 1834 the main cause of Guérin's aversion to the literature of the French romantic school, was that this literature, having had a religious origin, had ceased to be religious: 'it has forgotten,' he says, 'the house and the admonitions of its Father.' But his friend M. de Marzan tells us of a 'deplorable revolution' which, by 1836, had taken place in him. Guérin had become intimate with the chiefs of this very literature; he no longer went to church; 'the bond of a common faith, in which our friendship had its birth, existed between us no longer.' Then, again, 'this interregnum was not destined to last.' Reconverted

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to his old faith by suffering and by the pious efforts of his sister Eugénie, Guérin died a Catholic. His feelings about society underwent a like change. After 'entering the world with a secret horror,' after congratulating himself when he had been some months at Paris on being 'disengaged from the social tumult, out of the reach of those blows which, when I live in the thick of the world, bruise me, irritate me, or utterly crush me,' M. Sainte-Beuve tells us of him, two years afterwards, appearing in society 'a man of the world, elegant, even fashionable; a talker who could hold his own against the most brilliant talkers of Paris.'

In few natures, however, is there really such essential consistency as in Guérin's. He says of himself, in the very beginning of his journal: 'I owe everything to poetry, for there is no other name to give to the sum total of my thoughts; I owe to it whatever I now have pure, lofty, and solid in my

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soul; I owe to it all my consolations in the past; I shall probably owe to it my future.' Poetry, the poetical instinct, was indeed the basis of his nature; but to say so thus absolutely is not quite enough. One aspect of poetry fascinated Guérin's imagination and held it prisoner. Poetry is the interpretress of the natural world, and she is the interpretress of the moral world; it was as the interpretress of the natural world that she had Guérin for her mouthpiece. To make magically near and real the life of Nature, and man's life only so far as it is a part of that Nature, was his faculty; a faculty of naturalistic, not of moral interpretation. This faculty always has for its basis a peculiar temperament, an extraordinary delicacy of organisation and susceptibility to impressions; in exercising it the poet is in a great degree passive (Wordsworth thus speaks of a wise passiveness); he aspires to be a sort of human Æolian harp, catching and rendering every

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rustle of Nature. To assist at the evolution of the whole life of the world is his craving, and intimately to feel it all:

‘ . . . the glow, the thrill of life,
Where, where do these abound?’

is what he asks: he resists being riveted and held stationary by any single impression, but would be borne on for ever down an enchanted stream. He goes into religion and out of religion, into society and out of society, not from the motives which impel men in general, but to feel what it is all like; he is thus hardly a moral agent, and, like the passive and ineffectual Uranus of Keats’s poem, he may say:

‘ I am but a voice;
My life is but the life of winds and tides;
No more than winds and tides can I
avail.’

He hovers over the tumult of life, but does not really put his hand to it.

No one has expressed the aspirations of this temperament better than Guérin

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himself. In the last year of his life he writes:—

‘I return, as you see, to my old brooding over the world of Nature, that line which my thoughts irresistibly take; a sort of passion which gives me enthusiasm, tears, bursts of joy, and an eternal food for musing; and yet I am neither philosopher nor naturalist, nor anything learned whatsoever. There is one word which is the God of my imagination, the tyrant, I ought rather to say, that fascinates it, lures it onward, gives it work to do without ceasing, and will finally carry it I know not where; the word life.’

And in one place in his journal he says:—

‘My imagination welcomes every dream, every impression, without attaching itself to any, and goes on for ever seeking something new.’

And again in another:—

‘The longer I live, and the clearer I discern between true and false in society,

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the more does the inclination to live, not as a savage or a misanthrope, but as a solitary man on the frontiers of society, on the outskirts of the world, gain strength and grow in me. The birds come and go and make nests around our habitations, they are fellow-citizens of our farms and hamlets with us; but they take their flight in a heaven which is boundless, but the hand of God alone gives and measures to them their daily food, but they build their nests in the heart of the thick bushes, or hang them in the height of the trees. So would I, too, live, hovering round society, and having always at my back a field of liberty vast as the sky.'

In the same spirit he longed for travel. 'When one is a wanderer,' he writes to his sister, 'one feels that one fulfils the true condition of humanity.' And the last entry in his journal is,— 'The stream of travel is full of delight. Oh, who will set me adrift on this Nile!'

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Assuredly it is not in this temperament that the active virtues have their rise. On the contrary, this temperament, considered in itself alone, indisposes for the discharge of them. Something morbid and excessive, as manifested in Guérin, it undoubtedly has. In him, as in Keats, and as in another youth of genius, whose name, but the other day unheard of, Lord Houghton has so gracefully written in the history of English poetry, — David Gray, — the temperament, the talent itself, is deeply influenced by their mysterious malady; the temperament is devouring; it uses vital power too hard and too fast, paying the penalty in long hours of unutterable exhaustion and in premature death. The intensity of Guérin's depression is described to us by Guérin himself with the same incomparable touch with which he describes happier feelings; far oftener than any pleasurable sense of his gift he has 'the sense profound, near, immense, of my misery,

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of my inward poverty.' And again: 'My inward misery gains upon me; I no longer dare look within.' And on another day of gloom he does look within, and here is the terrible analysis:—

'Craving, unquiet, seeing only by glimpses, my spirit is stricken by all those ills which are the sure fruit of a youth doomed never to ripen into manhood. I grow old and wear myself out in the most futile mental strainings, and make no progress. My head seems dying, and when the wind blows I fancy I feel it, as if I were a tree, blowing through a number of withered branches in my top. Study is intolerable to me, or rather it is quite out of my power. Mental work brings on, not drowsiness, but an irritable and nervous disgust which drives me out, I know not where, into the streets and public places. The Spring, whose delights used to come every year stealthily and mysteriously to charm me in my retreat, crushes me

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this year under a weight of sudden hotness. I should be glad of any event which delivered me from the situation in which I am. If I were free I would embark for some distant country where I could begin life anew.'

Such is this temperament in the frequent hours when the sense of its own weakness and isolation crushes it to the ground. Certainly it was not for Guérin's happiness, or for Keats's, as men count happiness, to be as they were. Still the very excess and predominance of their temperament has given to the fruits of their genius a unique brilliancy and flavour. I have said that poetry interprets in two ways; it interprets by expressing with magical felicity the physiognomy and movement of the outward world, and it interprets by expressing, with inspired conviction, the ideas and laws of the inward world of man's moral and spiritual nature. In other words, poetry is interpretative both by hav-

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ing natural magic in it, and by having moral profundity. In both ways it illuminates man; it gives him a satisfying sense of reality; it reconciles him with himself and the universe. Thus Æschylus's 'δράσαντι παθεῖν' and his 'ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα' are alike interpretative. Shakspeare interprets both when he says,

‘Full many a glorious morning have
I seen,

Flatter the mountain-tops with sovran eye’;

and when he says,

‘There’s a divinity that shapes our
ends,

Rough-hew them as we will.’

These great poets unite in themselves the faculty of both kinds of interpretation, the naturalistic and the moral. But it is observable that in the poets who unite both kinds, the latter (the moral) usually ends by making itself the master. In Shakspeare the two kinds seem wonderfully to balance one

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another; but even in him the balance leans; his expression tends to become too little sensuous and simple, too much intellectualised. The same thing may be yet more strongly affirmed of Lucretius and of Wordsworth. In Shelley there is not a balance of the two gifts, nor even a co-existence of them, but there is a passionate straining after them both, and this is what makes Shelley, as a man, so interesting: I will not now inquire how much Shelley achieves as a poet, but whatever he achieves, he in general fails to achieve natural magic in his expression; in Mr Palgrave's charming 'Treasury' may be seen a gallery of his failures. But in Keats and Guérin, in whom the faculty of naturalistic interpretation is overpoweringly predominant, the natural magic is perfect; when they speak of the world they speak like Adam naming by divine inspiration the creatures; their expression corresponds with the thing's

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essential reality. Even between Keats and Guérin, however, there is a distinction to be drawn. Keats has, above all, a sense of what is pleasurable and open in the life of nature; for him she is the *Alma Parens*: his expression has, therefore, more than Guérin's, something genial, outward, and sensuous. Guérin has, above all, a sense of what there is adorable and secret in the life of Nature; for him she is the *Magna Parens*; his expression has, therefore, more than Keats's, something mystic, inward, and profound.

So he lived like a man possessed; with his eye not on his own career, not on the public, not on fame, but on the Isis whose veil he had uplifted. He published nothing: 'There is more power and beauty,' he writes, 'in the well-kept secret of one's self and one's thoughts, than in the display of a whole heaven that one may have inside one.' 'My spirit,' he answers

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the friends who urge him to write, 'is of the home-keeping order, and has no fancy for adventure; literary adventure is above all distasteful to it; for this, indeed (let me say so without the least self-sufficiency), it has a contempt. The literary career seems to me unreal, both in its own essence and in the rewards which one seeks from it, and therefore fatally marred by a secret absurdity.' His acquaintances, and among them distinguished men of letters, full of admiration for the originality and delicacy of his talent, laughed at his self-depreciation, warmly assured him of his powers. He received their assurances with a mournful incredulity, which contrasts curiously with the self-assertion of poor David Gray, whom I just now mentioned. 'It seems to me intolerable,' he writes, 'to appear to men other than one appears to God. My worst torture at this moment is the over-estimate which generous friends

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form of me. We are told that at the last judgment the secret of all consciences will be laid bare to the universe; would that mine were so this day, and that every passer-by could see me as I am!' 'High above my head,' he says at another time, 'far, far away, I seem to hear the murmur of that world of thought and feeling to which I aspire so often, but where I can never attain. I think of those of my own age who have wings strong enough to reach it, but I think of them without jealousy, and as men on earth contemplate the elect and their felicity.' And, criticising his own composition, 'When I begin a subject, my self-conceit' (says this exquisite artist) 'imagines I am doing wonders; and when I have finished, I see nothing but a wretched made-up imitation, composed of odds and ends of colour stolen from other people's palettes, and tastelessly mixed together on mine.' Such was his passion for perfection, his

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disdain for all poetical work not perfectly adequate and felicitous. The magic of expression, to which by the force of this passion he won his way, will make the name of Maurice de Guérin remembered in literature.

I have already mentioned the 'Centaur,' a sort of prose poem by Guérin, which Madame Sand published after his death. The idea of this composition came to him, M. Sainte-Beuve says, in the course of some visits which he made with his friend, M. Trebutien, a learned antiquarian, to the Museum of Antiquities in the Louvre. The free and wild life which the Greeks expressed by such creations as the Centaur had, as we might well expect, a strong charm for him; under the same inspiration he composed a 'Bacchante,' which was meant by him to form part of a prose poem on the adventures of Bacchus in India. Real as was the affinity which Guérin's nature had for these subjects, I doubt whether, in

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treating them, he would have found the full and final employment of his talent. But the beauty of his 'Centaur' is extraordinary; in its whole conception and expression this piece has in a wonderful degree that natural magic of which I have said so much, and the rhythm has a charm which bewitches even a foreigner. An old Centaur on his mountain is supposed to relate to Melampus, a human questioner, the life of his youth. Untranslatable as the piece is, I shall conclude with some extracts from it:—

'THE CENTAUR

'I had my birth in the caves of these mountains. Like the stream of this valley, whose first drops trickle from some weeping rock in a deep cavern, the first moment of my life fell in the darkness of a remote abode, and without breaking the silence. When our mothers draw near to the time of their delivery, they withdraw to the caverns,

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and in the depth of the loneliest of them, in the thickest of its gloom, bring forth, without uttering a plaint, a fruit silent as themselves. Their puissant milk makes us surmount, without weakness or dubious struggle, the first difficulties of life; and yet we leave our caverns later than you your cradles. The reason is that we have a doctrine that the early days of existence should be kept apart and enshrouded, as days filled with the presence of the gods. Nearly the whole term of my growth was passed in the darkness where I was born. The recesses of my dwelling ran so far under the mountain that I should not have known on which side was the exit, had not the winds, when they sometimes made their way through the opening, sent fresh airs in, and a sudden trouble. Sometimes, too, my mother came back to me, having about her the odours of the valleys, or streaming from the waters which were her haunt. Her

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returning thus, without a word said of the valleys or the rivers, but with the emanations from them hanging about her, troubled my spirit, and I moved up and down restlessly in my darkness. "What is it," I cried, "this outside world whither my mother is borne, and what reigns there in it so potent as to attract her so often?" At these moments my own force began to make me unquiet. I felt in it a power which could not remain idle; and betaking myself either to toss my arms or to gallop backwards and forwards in the spacious darkness of the cavern, I tried to make out from the blows which I dealt in the empty space, or from the transport of my course through it, in what direction my arms were meant to reach, or my feet to bear me. Since that day, I have wound my arms round the bust of Centaurs, and round the body of heroes, and round the trunk of oaks; my hands have assayed the rocks, the waters,

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plants without number, and the subtlest impressions of the air,—for I uplift them in the dark and still nights to catch the breaths of wind, and to draw signs whereby I may augur my road; my feet,—look, O Melampus, how worn they are! And yet, all benumbed as I am in this extremity of age, there are days when, in broad sunlight, on the mountain-tops, I renew these gallopings of my youth in the cavern, and with the same object, brandishing my arms and employing all the fleetness which yet is left to me.

‘O Melampus, thou who wouldst know the life of the Centaurs, wherefore have the gods willed that thy steps should lead thee to me, the oldest and most forlorn of them all? It is long since I have ceased to practise any part of their life. I quit no more this mountain summit, to which age has confined me. The point of my arrows now serves me only to uproot

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some tough-fibred plant; the tranquil lakes know me still, but the rivers have forgotten me. I will tell thee a little of my youth; but these recollections, issuing from a worn memory, come like the drops of a niggardly libation poured from a damaged urn.

‘The course of my youth was rapid and full of agitation. Movement was my life, and my steps knew no bound. One day when I was following the course of a valley seldom entered by the Centaurs, I discovered a man making his way up the stream-side on the opposite bank. He was the first whom my eyes had lighted on: I despised him. “Behold,” I cried, “at the utmost but the half of what I am! How short are his steps! and his movement how full of labour! Doubtless he is a Centaur overthrown by the gods, and reduced by them to drag himself along thus.”

· · · · ·
‘Wandering along at my own will like the rivers, feeling wherever I went

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the presence of Cybele, whether in the bed of the valleys, or on the height of the mountains, I bounded whither I would, like a blind and chainless life. But when Night, filled with the charm of the gods, overtook me on the slopes of the mountain, she guided me to the mouth of the caverns, and there tranquillised me as she tranquillises the billows of the sea. Stretched across the threshold of my retreat, my flanks hidden within the cave, and my head under the open sky, I watched the spectacle of the dark. The sea-gods, it is said, quit during the hours of darkness their palaces under the deep; they seat themselves on the promontories, and their eyes wander over the expanse of the waves. Even so I kept watch, having at my feet an expanse of life like the hushed sea. My regards had free range, and travelled to the most distant points. Like sea-beaches which never lose their wetness, the line of mountains to the west retained

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the imprint of gleams not perfectly wiped out by the shadows. In that quarter still survived, in pale clearness, mountain summits naked and pure. There I beheld at one time the god Pan descend, ever solitary; at another, the choir of the mystic divinities; or I saw pass some mountain nymph charm-struck by the night. Sometimes the eagles of Mount Olympus traversed the upper sky, and were lost to view among the far-off constellations, or in the shade of the dreaming forests.

‘Thou pursuest after wisdom, O Melampus, which is the science of the will of the gods; and thou roamest from people to people like a mortal driven by the destinies. In the times when I kept my night-watches before the caverns, I have sometimes believed that I was about to surprise the thought of the sleeping Cybele, and that the mother of the gods, betrayed by her dreams, would let fall some of her secrets; but I have never made out

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more than sounds which faded away in the murmur of night, or words inarticulate as the bubbling of the rivers.

“O Macareus,” one day said the great Chiron to me, whose old age I tended; “we are, both of us, Centaurs of the mountain; but how different are our lives! Of my days all the study is (thou seest it) the search for plants; thou, thou art like those mortals who have picked up on the waters or in the woods, and carried to their lips, some pieces of the reed-pipe thrown away by the god Pan. From that hour these mortals, having caught from their relics of the god a passion for wild life, or perhaps smitten with some secret madness, enter into the wilderness, plunge among the forests, follow the course of the streams, bury themselves in the heart of the mountains, restless, and haunted by an unknown purpose. The mares beloved of the winds in the farthest Scythia are not wilder than thou, nor

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more cast down at nightfall, when the North Wind has departed. Seekest thou to know the gods, O Macareus, and from what source men, animals, and the elements of the universal fire have their origin? But the aged Ocean, the father of all things, keeps locked within his own breast these secrets; and the nymphs, who stand around, sing as they weave their eternal dance before him, to cover any sound which might escape from his lips half-opened by slumber. The mortals, dear to the gods for their virtue, have received from their hands lyres to give delight to man, or the seeds of new plants to make him rich; but from their inexorable lips, nothing!"

‘Such were the lessons which the old Chiron gave me. Waned to the very extremity of life, the Centaur yet nourished in his spirit the most lofty discourse.

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‘For me, O Melampus, I decline into my last days, calm as the setting of the constellations. I still retain enterprise enough to climb to the top of the rocks, and there I linger late, either gazing on the wild and restless clouds, or to see come up from the horizon the rainy Hyades, the Pleiades, or the great Orion; but I feel myself perishing and passing quickly away, like a snow-wreath floating on the stream; and soon shall I be mingled with the waters which flow in the vast bosom of Earth.’

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WHO that had spoken of Maurice de Guérin could refrain from speaking of his sister Eugénie, the most devoted of sisters, one of the rarest and most beautiful of souls? 'There is nothing fixed, no duration, no vitality in the sentiments of women towards one another; their attachments are mere pretty knots of ribbon, and no more. In all the friendships of women I observe this slightness of the tie. I know no instance to the contrary, even in history. Orestes and Pylades have no sisters.' So she herself speaks of the friendships of her own sex. But Electra can attach herself to Orestes, if not to Chrysothemis. And to her brother Maurice, Eugénie de Guérin was Pylades and Electra in one.

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The name of Maurice de Guérin,—that young man so gifted, so attractive, so careless of fame, and so early snatched away; who died at twenty-nine; who, says his sister, ‘let what he did be lost with a carelessness so unjust to himself, set no value on any of his own productions, and departed hence without reaping the rich harvest which seemed his due’; who, in spite of his immaturity, in spite of his fragility, exercised such a charm, ‘furnished to others so much of that which all live by,’ that some years after his death his sister found in a country-house where he used to stay, in the journal of a young girl who had not known him, but who heard her family speak of him, his name, the date of his death, and these words, ‘*il était leur vie*’ (he was their life); whose talent, exquisite as that of Keats, with much less of sunlight, abundance, inventiveness, and facility in it than that of Keats, but with more of distinction and power,

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had 'that winning, delicate, and beautifully happy turn of expression' which is the stamp of the master,—is beginning to be well known to all lovers of literature. This establishment of Maurice's name was an object for which his sister Eugénie passionately laboured. While he was alive, she placed her whole joy in the flowering of this gifted nature; when he was dead, she had no other thought than to make the world know him as she knew him. She outlived him nine years, and her cherished task for those years was to rescue the fragments of her brother's composition, to collect them, to get them published. In pursuing this task she had at first cheering hopes of success; she had at last baffling and bitter disappointment. Her earthly business was at an end; she died. Ten years afterwards, it was permitted to the love of a friend, M. Trebutien, to effect for Maurice's memory what the love of a sister had failed to accomplish. But those who

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read, with delight and admiration, the journal and letters of Maurice de Guérin, could not but be attracted and touched by this sister Eugénie, who met them at every page. She seemed hardly less gifted, hardly less interesting, than Maurice himself. And presently M. Trebutien did for the sister what he had done for the brother. He published the journal of Mdlle. Eugénie de Guérin, and a few (too few, alas!) of her letters. The book has made a profound impression in France; and the fame which she sought only for her brother now crowns the sister also.

Parts of Mdlle. de Guérin's journal were several years ago printed for private circulation, and a writer in the *National Review* had the good fortune to fall in with them. The bees of our English criticism do not often roam so far afield for their honey, and this critic deserves thanks for having flitted in his quest of blossom to foreign parts, and for having settled upon a beautiful

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flower found there. He had the discernment to see that Mdlle. de Guérin was well worth speaking of, and he spoke of her with feeling and appreciation. But that, as I have said, was several years ago; even a true and feeling homage needs to be from time to time renewed, if the memory of its object is to endure; and criticism must not lose the occasion offered by Mdlle. de Guérin's journal being for the first time published to the world, of directing notice once more to this religious and beautiful character.

Eugénie de Guérin was born in 1805, at the château of Le Cayla, in Languedoc. Her family, though reduced in circumstances, was noble; and even when one is a saint one cannot quite forget that one comes of the stock of the Guarini of Italy, or that one counts among one's ancestors a Bishop of Senlis, who had the marshalling of the French order of battle on the day of Bouvines. Le Cayla was a solitary

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place, with its terrace looking down upon a stream-bed and valley; 'one may pass days there without seeing any living thing but the sheep, without hearing any living thing but the birds.' M. de Guérin, Eugénie's father, lost his wife when Eugénie was thirteen years old, and Maurice seven; he was left with four children,—Eugénie, Marie, Erembert, and Maurice,—of whom Eugénie was the eldest, and Maurice was the youngest. This youngest child, whose beauty and delicacy had made him the object of his mother's most anxious fondness, was commended by her in dying to the care of his sister Eugénie. Maurice at eleven years old went to school at Toulouse; then he went to the Collège Stanislas at Paris; then he became a member of the religious society which M. de Lamennais had formed at La Chênaie in Brittany; afterwards he lived chiefly at Paris, returning to Le Cayla, at the age of twenty-nine, to die. Distance, in those days, was a great

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obstacle to frequent meetings of the separated members of a French family of narrow means. Maurice de Guérin was seldom at Le Cayla after he had once quitted it, though his few visits to his home were long ones ; but he passed five years,—the period of his sojourn in Brittany, and of his first settlement in Paris,—without coming home at all. In spite of the check from these absences, in spite of the more serious check from a temporary alteration in Maurice's religious feelings, the union between the brother and sister was wonderfully close and firm. For they were knit together, not only by the tie of blood and early attachment, but also by the tie of a common genius. 'We were,' says Eugénie, 'two eyes looking out of one head.' She, on her part, brought to her love for her brother the devotedness of a woman, the intensity of a recluse, almost the solicitude of a mother. Her home duties prevented her from following the wish, which

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often arose in her, to join a religious sisterhood. There is a trace,—just a trace,—of an early attachment to a cousin; but he died when she was twenty-four. After that, she lived for Maurice. It was for Maurice that, in addition to her constant correspondence with him by letter, she began in 1834 her journal, which was sent to him by portions as it was finished. After his death she tried to continue it, addressing it to ‘Maurice in heaven.’ But the effort was beyond her strength; gradually the entries become rarer and rarer; and on the last day of December 1840 the pen dropped from her hand: the journal ends.

Other sisters have loved their brothers, and it is not her affection for Maurice, admirable as this was, which alone could have made Eugénie de Guérin celebrated. I have said that both brother and sister had genius: M. Sainte-Beuve goes so far as to say that the sister’s genius was equal, if

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not superior, to her brother's. No one has a more profound respect for M. Sainte-Beuve's critical judgments than I have, but it seems to me that this particular judgment needs to be a little explained and guarded. In Maurice's special talent, which was a talent for interpreting nature, for finding words which incomparably render the subtlest impressions which nature makes upon us, which bring the intimate life of nature wonderfully near to us, it seems to me that his sister was by no means his equal. She never, indeed, expresses herself without grace and intelligence; but her words, when she speaks of the life and appearances of nature, are in general but intellectual signs; they are not like her brother's—symbols equivalent with the thing symbolised. They bring the notion of the thing described to the mind, they do not bring the feeling of it to the imagination. Writing from the Nivernais, that region of vast woodlands in the centre of

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France : 'It does one good,' says Eugénie, 'to be going about in the midst of this enchanting nature, with flowers, birds, and verdure all round one, under this large and blue sky of the Nivernais. How I love the gracious form of it, and those little white clouds here and there, like cushions of cotton, hung aloft to rest the eye in this immensity!' It is pretty and graceful, but how different from the grave and pregnant strokes of Maurice's pencil! 'I have been along the Loire, and seen on its banks the plains where nature is puissant and gay; I have seen royal and antique dwellings, all marked by memories which have their place in the mournful legend of humanity,—Chambord, Blois, Amboise, Chenonceaux; then the towns on the two banks of the river,—Orleans, Tours, Saumur, Nantes; and at the end of it all, the Ocean rumbling. From these I passed back into the interior of the country, as far as Bourges and Nevers, a region of

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vast woodlands, in which murmurs of an immense range and fulness' (*ce beau torrent de rumeurs*, as, with an expression worthy of Wordsworth, he elsewhere calls them) 'prevail and never cease.' Words whose charm is like that of the sounds of the murmuring forest itself, and whose reverberations, like theirs, die away in the infinite distance of the soul.

Maurice's life was in the life of nature, and the passion for it consumed him; it would have been strange if his accent had not caught more of the soul of nature than Eugénie's accent, whose life was elsewhere. 'You will find in him,' Maurice says to his sister of a friend whom he was recommending to her, 'you will find in him that which you love, and which suits you better than anything else,—*l'onction, l'effusion, la mysticité*.' Unction, the pouring out of the soul, the rapture of the mystic, were dear to Maurice also; but in him the bent of his genius gave even to

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those a special direction of its own. In Eugénie they took the direction most native and familiar to them ; their object was the religious life.

And yet, if one analyses this beautiful and most interesting character quite to the bottom, it is not exactly as a saint that Eugénie de Guérin is remarkable. The ideal saint is a nature like Saint François de Sales or Fénelon ; a nature of ineffable sweetness and serenity, a nature in which struggle and revolt is over, and the whole man (so far as is possible to human infirmity) swallowed up in love. Saint Theresa (it is Mdlle. de Guérin herself who reminds us of it) endured twenty years of unacceptance and of repulse in her prayers ; yes, but the Saint Theresa whom Christendom knows is Saint Theresa repulsed no longer ! it is Saint Theresa accepted, rejoicing in love, radiant with ecstasy. Mdlle. de Guérin is not one of these saints arrived at perfect sweetness and calm, steeped in

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ecstasy; there is something primitive, indomitable in her, which she governs, indeed, but which chafes, which revolts. Somewhere in the depths of that strong nature there is a struggle, an impatience, an inquietude, an ennui, which endures to the end, and which leaves one, when one finally closes her journal, with an impression of profound melancholy. 'There are days,' she writes to her brother, 'when one's nature rolls itself up, and becomes a hedgehog. If I had you here at this moment, here close by me, how I should prick you! how sharp and hard!' 'Poor soul, poor soul,' she cries out to herself another day, 'what is the matter, what would you have? Where is that which will do you good? Everything is green, everything is in bloom, all the air has a breath of flowers. How beautiful it is! well, I will go out. No, I should be alone, and all this beauty, when one is alone, is worth nothing. What shall I do then? Read, write,

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pray, take a basket of sand on my head like that hermit-saint, and walk with it? Yes, work, work! keep busy the body which does mischief to the soul! I have been too little occupied to-day, and that is bad for one, and it gives a certain ennui which I have in me time to ferment.'

'A certain ennui which I have in me': her wound is there. In vain she follows the counsel of Fénelon: 'If God tires you, tell him that he tires you.' No doubt she obtained great and frequent solace and restoration from prayer: 'This morning I was suffering; well, at present I am calm, and this I owe to faith, simply to faith, to an act of faith. I can think of death and eternity without trouble, without alarm. Over a deep of sorrow there floats a divine calm, a suavity which is the work of God only. In vain have I tried other things at a time like this: nothing human comforts the soul, nothing human upholds it:—

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“ A l'enfant il faut sa mère,
A mon âme il faut mon Dieu.”

Still the ennui reappears, bringing with it hours of unutterable forlornness, and making her cling to her one great earthly happiness,—her affection for her brother,—with an intenseness, an anxiety, a desperation in which there is something morbid, and by which she is occasionally carried into an irritability, a jealousy which she herself is the first, indeed, to censure, which she severely represses, but which nevertheless leaves a sense of pain.

Mdlle. de Guérin's admirers have compared her to Pascal, and in some respects the comparison is just. But she cannot exactly be classed with Pascal, any more than with Saint François de Sales. Pascal is a man, and the inexhaustible power and activity of his mind leave him no leisure for ennui. He has not the sweetness and serenity of the perfect saint; he is, perhaps, ‘der strenge, kranke Pascal—the severe mor-

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bid Pascal,"—as Goethe (and, strange to say, Goethe at twenty-three, an age which usually feels Pascal's charm most profoundly) calls him. But the stress and movement of the lifelong conflict waged in him between his soul and his reason keep him full of fire, full of agitation, and keep his reader, who witnesses this conflict, animated and excited; the sense of forlornness and dejected weariness which clings to Eugénie de Guérin does not belong to Pascal. Eugénie de Guérin is a woman, and longs for a state of firm happiness, for an affection in which she may repose. The inward bliss of Saint Theresa or Fénelon would have satisfied her; denied this, she cannot rest satisfied with the triumphs of self-abasement, with the sombre joy of trampling the pride of life and of reason underfoot, of reducing all human hope and joy to insignificance; she repeats the magnificent words of Bossuet, words which both Catholicism and Protestantism

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have uttered with indefatigable iteration : 'On trouve au fond de tout le vide et le néant — At the bottom of everything one finds emptiness and nothingness,' but she feels, as every one but the true mystic must ever feel, their incurable sterility.

She resembles Pascal, however, by the clearness and firmness of her intelligence, going straight and instinctively to the bottom of any matter she is dealing with, and expressing herself about it with incomparable precision ; never fumbling with what she has to say, never imperfectly seizing or imperfectly presenting her thought. And to this admirable precision she joins a lightness of touch, a feminine ease and grace, a flowing facility which are her own. 'I do not say,' writes her brother Maurice, an excellent judge, 'that I find in myself a dearth of expression ; but I have not this abundance of yours, this productiveness of soul which streams forth, which courses along without ever

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failing, and always with an infinite charm.' And writing to her of some composition of hers, produced after her religious scruples had for a long time kept her from the exercise of her talent: 'You see, my dear Tortoise,' he writes, 'that your talent is no illusion, since after a period, I know not how long, of poetical inaction,—a trial to which any half-talent would have succumbed,—it rears its head again more vigorous than ever. It is really heart-breaking to see you repress and bind down, with I know not what scruples, your spirit, which tends with all the force of its nature to develop itself in this direction. Others have made it a case of conscience for you to resist this impulse, and I make it one for you to follow it.' And she says of herself, on one of her freer days: 'It is the instinct of my life to write, as it is the instinct of the fountain to flow.' The charm of her expression is not a sensuous and imaginative charm like that of Maurice,

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but rather an intellectual charm; it comes from the texture of the style rather than from its elements; it is not so much in the words as in the turn of the phrase, in the happy cast and flow of the sentence. Recluse as she was, she had a great correspondence: every one wished to have letters from her; and no wonder.

To this strength of intelligence and talent of expression she joined a great force of character. Religion had early possessed itself of this force of character, and reinforced it: in the shadow of the Cevennes, in the sharp and tonic nature of this region of Southern France, which has seen the Albigensians, which has seen the Camisards, Catholicism too is fervent and intense. Eugénie de Guérin was brought up amidst strong religious influences, and they found in her a nature on which they could lay firm hold. I have said that she was not a saint of the order of Saint François de Sales or Fénelon; perhaps she had too

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keen an intelligence to suffer her to be this, too forcible and impetuous a character. But I did not mean to imply the least doubt of the reality, the profoundness, of her religious life. She was penetrated by the power of religion; religion was the master-influence of her life; she derived immense consolations from religion, she earnestly strove to conform her whole nature to it; if there was an element in her which religion could not perfectly reach, perfectly transmute, she groaned over this element in her, she chid it, she made it bow. Almost every thought in her was brought into harmony with religion; and what few thoughts were not thus brought into harmony were brought into subjection.

Then she had her affection for her brother; and this, too, though perhaps there might be in it something a little over-eager, a little too absolute, a little too susceptible, was a pure, a devoted affection. It was not only passionate,

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it was tender. It was tender, pliant, and self-sacrificing to a degree that not in one nature out of a thousand,—of natures with a mind and will like hers,—is found attainable. She thus united extraordinary power of intelligence, extraordinary force of character, and extraordinary strength of affection; and all these under the control of a deep religious feeling.

This is what makes her so remarkable, so interesting. I shall try and make her speak for herself, that she may show us the characteristic sides of her rare nature with her own inimitable touch.

It must be remembered that her journal is written for Maurice only; in her lifetime no eye but his ever saw it. '*Ceci n'est pas pour le public*,' she writes; '*c'est de l'intime, c'est de l'âme, c'est pour un.*' 'This is not for the public; it contains my inmost thoughts, my very soul; it is for *one*.' And Maurice, this *one*, was a kind of second self to her. 'We see

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things with the same eyes; what you find beautiful, I find beautiful; God has made our souls of one piece.' And this genuine confidence in her brother's sympathy gives to the entries in her journal a naturalness and simple freedom rare in such compositions. She felt that he would understand her, and be interested in all that she wrote.

One of the first pages of her journal relates an incident of the home-life of Le Cayla, the smallest detail of which Maurice liked to hear; and in relating it she brings this simple life before us. She is writing in November, 1834:—

'I am furious with the gray cat. The mischievous beast has made away with a little half-frozen pigeon, which I was trying to thaw by the side of the fire. The poor little thing was just beginning to come round; I meant to tame him; he would have grown fond of me; and there is my whole scheme eaten up by a cat! This event, and all the rest of to-day's history, has passed in the kit-

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chen. Here I take up my abode all the morning and a part of the evening, ever since I am without Mimi. I have to superintend the cook; sometimes papa comes down, and I read to him by the oven, or by the fireside, some bits out of the "Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church." This book struck Pierril with astonishment. "*Que de mout aqui dé-dins!* What a lot of words there are inside it!" This boy is a real original. One evening he asked me if the soul was immortal; then afterwards, what a philosopher was? We had got upon great questions, as you see. When I told him that a philosopher was a person who was wise and learned: "Then, mademoiselle, you are a philosopher." This was said with an air of simplicity and sincerity which might have made even Socrates take it as a compliment; but it made me laugh so much that my gravity as catechist was gone for that evening. A day or two ago Pierril left us, to his great sorrow: his time with

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us was up on Saint Brice's day. Now he goes about with his little dog, truffle-hunting. If he comes this way I shall go and ask him if he still thinks I look like a philosopher.'

Her good sense and spirit made her discharge with alacrity her household tasks in this patriarchal life of Le Cayla, and treat them as the most natural thing in the world. She sometimes complains, to be sure, of burning her fingers at the kitchen-fire. But when a literary friend of her brother expresses enthusiasm about her and her poetical nature: 'The poetess,' she says, 'whom this gentleman believes me to be, is an ideal being, infinitely removed from the life which is actually mine—a life of occupations, a life of household-business, which takes up all my time. How could I make it otherwise? I am sure I do not know; and, besides, my duty is in this sort of life, and I have no wish to escape from it.'

Among these occupations of the patri-

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archal life of the châtelaine of Le Cayla intercourse with the poor fills a prominent place :—

‘To-day,’ she writes on the 9th of December 1834, ‘I have been warming myself at every fireside in the village. It is a round which Mimi and I often make, and in which I take pleasure. To-day we have been seeing sick people, and holding forth on doses and sick-room drinks. “Take this, do that”; and they attend to us just as if we were the doctor. We prescribed shoes for a little thing who was amiss from having gone barefoot; to the brother, who, with a bad headache, was lying quite flat, we prescribed a pillow; the pillow did him good, but I am afraid it will hardly cure him. He is at the beginning of a bad feverish cold: and these poor people live in the filth of their hovels like animals in their stable; the bad air poisons them. When I come home to Le Cayla I seem to be in a palace.’

She had books, too; not in abund-

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ance, not for the fancying them; the list of her library is small, and it is enlarged slowly and with difficulty. The 'Letters of Saint Theresa,' which she had long wished to get, she sees in the hands of a poor servant girl, before she can procure them for herself. 'What then?' is her comment: 'very likely she makes a better use of them than I could.' But she has the 'Imitation,' the 'Spiritual Works' of Bossuet and Fénelon, the 'Lives of the Saints,' Corneille, Racine, André Chénier, and Lamartine; Madame de Staël's book on Germany, and French translations of Shakspeare's plays, Ossian, the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' Scott's 'Old Mortality' and 'Redgauntlet,' and the 'Promessi Sposi' of Manzoni. Above all, she has her own mind; her meditations in the lonely fields, on the oak-grown hill-side of 'The Seven Springs'; her meditations and writing in her own room, her *chambrette*, her *délicieux chez moi*, where every night, before she goes to bed, she opens the

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window to look out upon the sky,—the balmy moonlit sky of Languedoc. This life of reading, thinking, and writing was the life she liked best, the life that most truly suited her. ‘I find writing has become almost a necessity to me. Whence does it arise, this impulse to give utterance, to the voice of one’s spirit, to pour out my thoughts before God and one human being? I say one human being, because I always imagine that you are present, that you see what I write. In the stillness of a life like this my spirit is happy, and, as it were, dead to all that goes on upstairs or downstairs, in the house or out of the house. But this does not last long. “Come, my poor spirit,” I then say to myself, “we must go back to the things of this world.” And I take my spinning, or a book, or a saucepan, or I play with Wolf or Trilby. Such a life as this I call heaven upon earth.’

Tastes like these, joined with a talent like Mdlle. de Guérin’s, naturally in-

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spire thoughts of literary composition. Such thoughts she had, and perhaps she would have been happier if she had followed them; but she never could satisfy herself that to follow them was quite consistent with the religious life, and her projects of composition were gradually relinquished:—

‘Would to God that my thoughts, my spirit, had never taken their flight beyond the narrow round in which it is my lot to live! In spite of all that people say to the contrary, I feel that I cannot go beyond my needlework and my spinning without going too far: I feel it, I believe it: well, then, I will keep in my proper sphere; however much I am tempted, my spirit shall not be allowed to occupy itself with great matters until it occupies itself with them in Heaven.’

And again:—

‘My journal has been untouched for a long while. Do you want to know why? It is because the time seems to

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me misspent which I spend in writing it. We owe God an account of every minute; and is it not a wrong use of our minutes to employ them in writing a history of our transitory days?’

She overcomes her scruples, and goes on writing the journal; but again and again they return to her. Her brother tells her of the pleasure and comfort something she has written gives to a friend of his in affliction. She answers:—

‘It is from the Cross that those thoughts come, which your friend finds so soothing, so unspeakably tender. None of them come from me. I feel my own aridity; but I feel, too, that God, when he will, can make an ocean flow upon this bed of sand. It is the same with so many simple souls, from which proceed the most admirable things; because they are in direct relation with God, without false science and without pride. And thus I am gradually losing my taste for books;

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I say to myself: "What can they teach me which I shall not one day know in Heaven? let God be my master and my study here!" I try to make him so, and I find myself the better for it. I read little; I go out little; I plunge myself in the inward life. How infinite are the sayings, doings, feelings, events of that life! Oh, if you could but see them! But what avails it to make them known? God alone should be admitted to the sanctuary of the soul.'

Beautifully as she says all this, one cannot, I think, read it without a sense of disquietude, without a presentiment that this ardent spirit is forcing itself from its natural bent, that the beatitude of the true mystic will never be its earthly portion. And yet how simple and charming is her picture of the life of religion which she chose as her ark of refuge, and in which she desired to place all her happiness:—

'Cloaks, clogs, umbrellas, all the apparatus of winter, went with us this

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morning to Andillac, where we have passed the whole day; some of it at the curé's house, the rest in church. How I like this life of a country Sunday, with its activity, its journeys to church, its liveliness! You find all your neighbours on the road; you have a curtsy from every woman you meet, and then, as you go along, such a talk about the poultry, the sheep and cows, the good man and the children! My great delight is to give a kiss to these children, and see them run away and hide their blushing faces in their mother's gown. They are alarmed at *las doumaïselos*, as at a being of another world. One of these little things said the other day to its grandmother, who was talking of coming to see us: "*Minino*, you mustn't go to that castle; there is a black hole there." What is the reason that in all ages the noble's château has been an object of terror? Is it because of the horrors that were committed there in old times? I suppose so.'

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This vague horror of the château, still lingering in the mind of the French peasant fifty years after he has stormed it, is indeed curious, and is one of the thousand indications how unlike aristocracy on the Continent has been to aristocracy in England. But this is one of the great matters with which Mdlle. de Guérin would not have us occupied; let us pass to the subject of Christmas in Languedoc:—

‘Christmas is come; the beautiful festival, the one I love most, and which gives me the same joy as it gave the shepherds of Bethlehem. In real truth, one’s whole soul sings with joy at this beautiful coming of God upon earth,—a coming which here is announced on all sides of us by music and by our charming *nadalet*. Nothing at Paris can give you a notion of what Christmas is with us. You have not even the midnight-mass. We all of us went to it, papa at our head, on the most perfect night possible. Never was there

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a finer sky than ours was that midnight;—so fine that papa kept perpetually throwing back the hood of his cloak, that he might look up at the sky. The ground was white with hoar-frost, but we were not cold; besides, the air, as we met it, was warmed by the bundles of blazing torchwood which our servants carried in front of us to light us on our way. It was delightful, I do assure you; and I should like you to have seen us there on our road to church, in those lanes with the bushes along their banks as white as if they were in flower. The hoar-frost makes the most lovely flowers. We saw a long spray so beautiful that we wanted to take it with us as a garland for the communion-table, but it melted in our hands: all flowers fade so soon! I was very sorry about my garland; it was mournful to see it drip away, and get smaller and smaller every minute.'

The religious life is at bottom everywhere alike; but it is curious to note

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the variousness of its setting and outward circumstance. Catholicism has these so different from Protestantism! and in Catholicism these accessories have, it cannot be denied, a nobleness and amplitude which in Protestantism is often wanting to them. In Catholicism they have, from the antiquity of this form of religion, from its pretensions to universality, from its really widespread prevalence, from its sensuousness, something European, august, and imaginative: in Protestantism they often have, from its inferiority in all these respects, something provincial, mean, and prosaic. In revenge, Protestantism has a future before it, a prospect of growth in alliance with the vital movement of modern society; while Catholicism appears to be bent on widening the breach between itself and the modern spirit, to be fatally losing itself in the multiplication of dogmas, Mariolatry, and miracle-mongering. But the style and circumstance

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of actual Catholicism is grander than its present tendency, and the style and circumstance of Protestantism is meaner than its tendency. While I was reading the journal of Mdlle. de Guérin there came into my hands the memoir and poems of a young Englishwoman, Miss Emma Tatham; and one could not but be struck with the singular contrast which the two lives,—in their setting rather than in their inherent quality,—present. Miss Tatham had not, certainly, Mdlle. de Guérin's talent, but she had a sincere vein of poetic feeling, a genuine aptitude for composition. Both were fervent Christians, and, so far, the two lives have a real resemblance; but, in the setting of them, what a difference! The Frenchwoman is a Catholic in Languedoc; the Englishwoman is a Protestant at Margate; Margate, that brick-and-mortar image of English Protestantism, representing it in all its prose, all its uncomeliness,—let me add, all its

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salubrity. Between the external form and fashion of these two lives, between the Catholic Mdle. de Guérin's *nadalet* at the Languedoc Christmas, her chapel of moss at Easter-time, her daily reading of the life of a saint, carrying her to the most diverse times, places, and peoples,—her quoting, when she wants to fix her mind upon the staunchness which the religious aspirant needs, the words of Saint Macedonius to a hunter whom he met in the mountains, ‘I pursue after God, as you pursue after game,’—her quoting, when she wants to break a village girl of disobedience to her mother, the story of the ten disobedient children whom at Hippo Saint Augustine saw palsied;—between all this and the bare, blank, narrowly English setting of Miss Tatham's Protestantism, her ‘union in church-fellowship with the worshippers at Hawley Square Chapel, Margate’; her ‘singing with soft, sweet voice, the animating lines—

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“My Jesus to know, and feel his blood
flow,

’Tis life everlasting, ’tis heaven be-
low”’;

her ‘young female teachers belonging to the Sunday-school,’ and her ‘Mr Thomas Rowe, a venerable class-leader,’—what a dissimilarity! In the ground of the two lives, a likeness; in all their circumstance, what unlikeness! An unlikeness, it will be said, in that which is non-essential and indifferent. Non-essential,—yes; indifferent,—no. The signal want of grace and charm in English Protestantism’s setting of its religious life is not an indifferent matter; it is a real weakness. ‘This ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone.’

I have said that the present tendency of Catholicism,—the Catholicism of the main body of the Catholic clergy and laity,—seems likely to exaggerate rather than to remove all that in this form of religion is most repugnant to

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reason; but this Catholicism was not that of Mdlle. de Guérin. The insufficiency of her Catholicism comes from a doctrine which Protestantism, too, has adopted, although Protestantism, from its inherent element of freedom, may find it easier to escape from it; a doctrine with a certain attraction for all noble natures, but, in the modern world at any rate, incurably sterile,—the doctrine of the emptiness and nothingness of human life, of the superiority of renouncement to activity, of quietism to energy; the doctrine which makes effort for things on this side of the grave a folly, and joy in things on this side of the grave a sin. But her Catholicism is remarkably free from the faults which Protestants commonly think inseparable from Catholicism; the relation to the priest, the practice of confession, assume, when she speaks of them, an aspect which is not that under which Exeter Hall knows them, but which,—unless one is of the number

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of those who prefer regarding that by which men and nations die to regarding that by which they live,—one is glad to study. ‘*La confession*,’ she says twice in her journal, ‘*n’est qu’une expansion du repentir dans l’amour*’; and her weekly journey to the confessional in the little church of Cahuzac is her ‘*cher pèlerinage*’; the little church is the place where she has ‘*laissé tant de misères*.’

‘This morning,’ she writes one 28th of November, ‘I was up before daylight, dressed quickly, said my prayers, and started with Marie for Cahuzac. When we got there, the chapel was occupied, which I was not sorry for. I like not to be hurried, and to have time, before I go in, to lay bare my soul before God. This often takes me a long time, because my thoughts are apt to be flying about like these autumn leaves. At ten o’clock I was on my knees, listening to words the most salutary that were ever spoken; and

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I went away, feeling myself a better being. Every burden thrown off leaves us with a sense of brightness; and when the soul has laid down the load of its sins at God's feet, it feels as if it had wings. What an admirable thing is confession! What comfort, what light, what strength is given me every time after I have said, I have sinned.'

This blessing of confession is the greater, she says, 'the more the heart of the priest to whom we confide our repentance is like that divine heart which "has so loved us." This is what attaches me to M. Bories.' M. Bories was the curé of her parish, a man no longer young, and of whose loss, when he was about to leave them, she thus speaks:—

'What a grief for me! how much I lose in losing this faithful guide of my conscience, heart, and mind, of my whole self, which God has appointed to be in his charge, and which let itself be in his charge so gladly! He knew the re-

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solves which God had put in my heart, and I had need of his help to follow them. Our new curé cannot supply his place; he is so young! and then he seems so inexperienced, so undecided! It needs firmness to pluck a soul out of the midst of the world, and to uphold it against the assaults of flesh and blood. It is Saturday, my day for going to Cahuzac; I am just going there, perhaps I shall come back more tranquil. God has always given me some good thing there, in that chapel where I have left behind me so many miseries.'

Such is confession for her when the priest is worthy; and, when he is not worthy, she knows how to separate the man from the office:—

'To-day I am going to do something which I dislike; but I will do it, with God's help. Do not think I am on my way to the stake; it is only that I am going to confess to a priest in whom I have not confidence, but who is the only one here. In this act of religion the

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man must always be separated from the priest, and sometimes the man must be annihilated.'

The same clear sense, the same freedom from superstition, shows itself in all her religious life. She tells us, to be sure, how once, when she was a little girl, she stained a new frock, and on praying, in her alarm, to an image of the Virgin which hung in her room, saw the stains vanish: even the austere Protestant will not judge such Mariolatry as this very harshly. But, in general, the Virgin Mary fills in the religious parts of her journal no prominent place; it is Jesus, not Mary. 'Oh, how well has Jesus said: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." It is only there, only in the bosom of God, that we can rightly weep, rightly rid ourselves of our burden.' And again: 'The mystery of suffering makes one grasp the belief of something to be expiated, something to be won. I see it in Jesus Christ, the Man of Sorrow.

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It was necessary that the Son of Man should suffer. That is all we know in the troubles and calamities of life.'

And who has ever spoken of justification more impressively and piously than Mdlle. de Guérin speaks of it, when, after reckoning the number of minutes she has lived, she exclaims:—

'My God, what have we done with all these minutes of ours, which thou, too, wilt one day reckon? Will there be any of them to count for eternal life? will there be many of them? will there be one of them? "If thou, O Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it!" This close scrutiny of our time may well make us tremble, all of us who have advanced more than a few steps in life; for God will judge us otherwise than as he judges the lilies of the field. I have never been able to understand the security of those who placed their whole reliance, in presenting themselves before God, upon a good conduct

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in the ordinary relations of human life. As if all our duties were confined within the narrow sphere of this world! To be a good parent, a good child, a good citizen, a good brother or sister, is not enough to procure entrance into the kingdom of heaven. God demands other things besides these kindly social virtues of him whom he means to crown with an eternity of glory.'

And, with this zeal for the spirit and power of religion, what prudence in her counsels of religious practice; what discernment, what measure! She has been speaking of the charm of the 'Lives of the Saints,' and she goes on:—

'Notwithstanding this, the 'Lives of the Saints' seem to me, for a great many people, dangerous reading. I would not recommend them to a young girl, or even to some women who are no longer young. What one reads has such power over one's feelings; and these, even in seeking God, sometimes

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go astray. Alas, we have seen it in poor C.'s case. What care one ought to take with a young person ; with what she reads, what she writes, her society, her prayers,—all of them matters which demand a mother's tender watchfulness! I remember many things I did at fourteen, which my mother, had she lived, would not have let me do. I would have done anything for God's sake ; I would have cast myself into an oven, and assuredly things like that are not God's will ; He is not pleased by the hurt one does to one's health through that ardent but ill-regulated piety which, while it impairs the body, often leaves many a fault flourishing. And, therefore, Saint François de Sales used to say to the nuns who asked his leave to go bare-foot : "Change your brains and keep your shoes."

Meanwhile Maurice, in a five years' absence, and amid the distractions of Paris, lost, or seemed to his sister to lose, something of his fondness for his

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home and its inmates : he certainly lost his early religious habits and feelings. It is on this latter loss that Mdlle. de Guérin's journal oftenest touches,—with infinite delicacy, but with infinite anguish :—

‘Oh, the agony of being in fear for a soul's salvation, who can describe it! That which caused our Saviour the keenest suffering, in the agony of his Passion, was not so much the thought of the torments he was to endure, as the thought that these torments would be of no avail for a multitude of sinners; for all those who set themselves against their redemption, or who do not care for it. The mere anticipation of this obstinacy and this heedlessness had power to make sorrowful, even unto death, the divine Son of Man. And this feeling all Christian souls, according to the measure of faith and love granted them, more or less share.’

Maurice returned to Le Cayla in the summer of 1837, and passed six months

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there. This meeting entirely restored the union between him and his family. 'These six months with us,' writes his sister, 'he ill, and finding himself so loved by us all, had entirely reattached him to us. Five years without seeing us, had perhaps made him a little lose sight of our affection for him; having found it again, he met it with all the strength of his own. He had so firmly renewed, before he left us, all family ties, that nothing but death could have broken them.' The separation in religious matters between the brother and sister gradually diminished, and before Maurice died it had ceased. I have elsewhere spoken of Maurice's religious feeling and his character. It is probable that his divergence from his sister in this sphere of religion was never so wide as she feared, and that his reunion with her was never so complete as she hoped. 'His errors were passed,' she says, 'his illusions were cleared away; by the call of his nature,

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by original disposition, he had come back to sentiments of order. I knew all, I followed each of his steps; out of the fiery sphere of the passions (which held him but a little moment) I saw him pass into the sphere of the Christian life. It was a beautiful soul, the soul of Maurice.' But the illness which had caused his return to Le Cayla reappeared after he got back to Paris in the winter of 1837-8. Again he seemed to recover; and his marriage with a young Creole lady, Mdlle. Caroline de Gervain, took place in the autumn of 1838. At the end of September in that year Mdlle. de Guérin had joined her brother in Paris; she was present at his marriage, and stayed with him and his wife for some months afterwards. Her journal recommences in April 1839. Zealously as she had promoted her brother's marriage, cordial as were her relations with her sister-in-law, it is evident that a sense of loss, of loneliness, invades her, and sometimes weighs

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her down. She writes in her journal on the 4th of May:—

‘God knows when we shall see one another again! My own Maurice, must it be our lot to live apart, to find that this marriage which I had so much share in bringing about, which I hoped would keep us so much together, leaves us more asunder than ever? For the present and for the future, this troubles me more than I can say. My sympathies, my inclinations, carry me more towards you than towards any other member of our family. I have the misfortune to be fonder of you than of anything else in the world, and my heart had from of old built in you its happiness. Youth gone and life declining, I looked forward to quitting the scene with Maurice. At any time of life a great affection is a great happiness; the spirit comes to take refuge in it entirely. O delight and joy which will never be your sister’s portion! Only in the direction of God shall I find an

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issue for my heart to love as it has the notion of loving, as it has the power of loving.'

From such complainings, in which there is undoubtedly something morbid,—complainings which she herself blamed, to which she seldom gave way, but which, in presenting her character, it is not just to put wholly out of sight,—she was called by the news of an alarming return of her brother's illness. For some days the entries in the journal show her agony of apprehension. 'He coughs, he coughs still! Those words keep echoing for ever in my ears, and pursue me wherever I go; I cannot look at the leaves on the trees without thinking that the winter will come, and then the consumptive die.' She went to him, and brought him back by slow stages to Le Cayla, dying. He died on the 19th of July 1839.

Thenceforward the energy of life ebbed in her; but the main chords of her being, the chord of affection, the

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chord of religious longing, the chord of intelligence, the chord of sorrow, gave, so long as they answered to the touch at all, a deeper and finer sound than ever. Always she saw before her, 'that beloved pale face'; 'that beautiful head, with all its different expressions, smiling, speaking, suffering, dying,' regarded her always:—

'I have seen his coffin in the same room, in the same spot where I remember seeing, when I was a very little girl, his cradle, when I was brought home from Gaillac, where I was then staying, for his christening. This christening was a grand one, full of rejoicing, more than that of any of the rest of us; specially marked. I enjoyed myself greatly, and went back to Gaillac next day, charmed with my new little brother. Two years afterwards I came home, and brought with me a frock for him of my own making. I dressed him in the frock, and took him out with me along by the warren at the north of

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the house, and there he walked a few steps alone,—his first walking alone,—and I ran with delight to tell my mother the news: “Maurice, Maurice has begun to walk by himself!”—Recollections which, coming back to-day, break one’s heart.’

The shortness and suffering of her brother’s life filled her with an agony of pity. ‘Poor beloved soul, you have had hardly any happiness here below; your life has been so short, your repose so rare. O God, uphold me, establish my heart in thy faith! Alas, I have too little of this supporting me! How we have gazed at him and loved him, and kissed him,—his wife, and we, his sisters; he lying lifeless in his bed, his head on the pillow as if he were asleep! Then we followed him to the churchyard, to the grave, to his last resting-place, and prayed over him, and wept over him; and we are here again, and I am writing to him again, as if he were staying away from home, as if he were

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in Paris. My beloved one, can it be, shall we never see one another again on earth?’

But in heaven?—and here, though love and hope finally prevailed, the very passion of the sister’s longing sometimes inspired torturing inquietudes:—

‘I am broken down with misery. I want to see him. Every moment I pray to God to grant me this grace. Heaven, the world of spirits, is it so far from us? O depth, O mystery of the other life which separates us! I, who was so eagerly anxious about him, who wanted so to know all that happened to him,—wherever he may be now, it is over! I follow him into the three abodes; I stop wistfully before the place of bliss, I pass on to the place of suffering,—to the gulf of fire. My God, my God, no! Not there let my brother be! not there! And he is not: his soul, the soul of Maurice, among the lost . . . horrible fear, no! But in purgatory, where the soul is cleansed by suffering,

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where the failings of the heart are expiated, the doubtings of the spirit, the half-yieldings to evil? Perhaps my brother is there and suffers, and calls to us amidst his anguish of repentance, as he used to call to us amidst his bodily suffering: "Help me, you who love me." Yes, beloved one, by prayer. I will go and pray; prayer has been such a power to me, and I will pray to the end. Prayer! Oh! and prayer for the dead; it is the dew of purgatory.'

Often, alas, the gracious dew would not fall; the air of her soul was parched; the arid wind, which was somewhere in the depths of her being, blew. She marks in her journal the 1st of May, 'this return of the loveliest month in the year,' only to keep up the old habit; even the month of May can no longer give her any pleasure: '*Tout est changé*—all is changed.' She is crushed by 'the misery which has nothing good in it, the tearless, dry misery, which bruises the heart like a hammer.'

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‘I am dying to everything. I am dying of a slow moral agony, a condition of unutterable suffering. Lie there, my poor journal! be forgotten with all this world which is fading away from me. I will write here no more until I come to life again, until God re-awakens me out of this tomb in which my soul lies buried. Maurice, my beloved! it was not thus with me when I had you! The thought of Maurice could revive me from the most profound depression: to have him in the world was enough for me. With Maurice, to be buried alive would not have seemed dull to me.’

And, as a burden to this funereal strain, the old *vide et néant* of Bossuet, profound, solemn, sterile:—

‘So beautiful in the morning, and in the evening, *that!* how the thought disenchanting one, and turns one from the world! I can understand that Spanish grandee who, after lifting up the winding-sheet of a beautiful queen, threw

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himself into the cloister and became a great saint. I would have all my friends at La Trappe, in the interest of their eternal welfare. Not that in the world one cannot be saved, not that there are not in the world duties to be discharged as sacred and as beautiful as there are in the cloister, but . . . '

And there she stops, and a day or two afterwards her journal comes to an end. A few fragments, a few letters carry us on a little later, but after the 22nd of August 1845 there is nothing. To make known her brother's genius to the world was the one task she set herself after his death; in 1840 came Madame Sand's noble tribute to him in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*; then followed projects of raising a yet more enduring monument to his fame, by collecting and publishing his scattered compositions; these projects I have already said, were baffled;—Mdlle. de Guérin's letter of the 22nd of August 1845 relates to this disappointment. In silence, dur-

EUGÉNIE DE GUÉRIN

ing nearly three years more, she faded away at Le Cayla. She died on the 31st of May 1848.

M. Trebutien has accomplished the pious task in which Mdlle. de Guérin was baffled, and has established Maurice's fame; by publishing this journal he has established Eugénie's also. She was very different from her brother; but she too, like him, had that in her which preserves a reputation. Her soul had the same characteristic quality as his talent,—distinction. Of this quality the world is impatient; it chafes against it, rails at it, insults it, hates it;—it ends by receiving its influence, and by undergoing its law. This quality at last inexorably corrects the world's blunders, and fixes the world's ideals. It procures that the popular poet shall not finally pass for a Pindar, nor the popular historian for a Tacitus, nor the popular preacher for a Bossuet. To the circle of spirits marked by this rare quality, Maurice and Eugénie de

ESSAYS

Guérin belong; they will take their place in the sky which these inhabit, and shine close to one another, *lucida sidera*.

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